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Faith in Action for Social Justice

A HEART FOR PEACE

The surprising new surge in evangelical peacemaking.



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MISSIONAL MOVEMENT MISSIONAL CHANGE



Lindsey Bulger and Jason Clifton are two M.Div. students who think about mission differently. As the founders of the Seeking Shalom movement on the Luther Seminary campus, Lindsey and Jason are effectively campaigning for things like justice, community and peace. Their ministry—their mission—is to make a real change in the world—starting at Luther Seminary.



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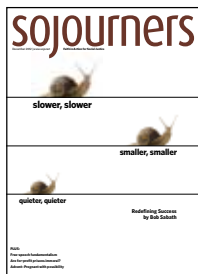
OVER OUR FOUR-decade-plus history, Sojourners has been involved in many faithful movements for peace. From the Vietnam War to Afghanistan, and from the Cold War arms race to ongoing nuclear proliferation, we have worked for a time when the world “studies war no more.” Through the years leaders of those peace movements have come primarily from the Catholic and mainline Protestant traditions, but in this issue’s cover package we’re happy to tell the story of a specifically evangelical peacemaking witness, marked in part by a conference at Georgetown University last fall under the rubric Evangelicals for Peace.

Peacemaking takes many forms, so this month we bring you updates from ground-level peace advocates around the planet. “Bullet-Proof Gospel” is a profile of James Byensi, a pastor in eastern Congo helping his community stand up against the cycle of violence in that war-torn region; “Nonviolence and the Drug War” looks at the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity and other groups speaking out against the violence of Mexico’s militarized drug war. In our commentary section, Myla Leguro reports from the ground on the many grassroots peace groups who, along with the Nonviolent Peaceforce, have helped win a historic ceasefire

in the long-running conflict in Mindanao, Philippines; Aimee Kang tells us about the activists worldwide who, as part of an event called One Billion Rising this Feb. 14, speak against violence against women.

Also this month, we’re pleased to welcome to our pages recent Sojourners interns Anne Marie Roderick and Joshua Witchger, reflecting on the holy power of bread-making and foot-washing, and on how liturgy “scoops us up locally and globally, backward and forward.” Whatever our form of worship, from liturgy to a praise band, may we all know God’s peace—and find ways to seek peace on earth. ■

Letters



REAL SLOW

Regarding “Slow Down and Know that I am God,” by C. Christopher Smith (December 2012): A real “slow church”

would be one where there was no planned-weeks-or-years-in-advance church services and where the Holy Spirit was allowed to be in actual charge of the services. There would be no time limit on how long a service would last. Those in attendance would be allowed to participate as the Lord wills. Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians. A “slow church” wouldn’t be an entertainment center with a band and worship singers, with words flashed on a TV screen, as in many churches today.

Joe Allen Doty
Tulsa, Oklahoma

MOVE YOUR MONEY

Wells Fargo has been particularly active in the private prison venture (“A Call to Conversion,” by Sheldon C. Good, December 2012). That policy—along with its refusal to refinance mortgage loans while continuing to foreclose on thousands—is why my family is planning to join the nationwide Move Your Money movement. It takes some effort to divorce from a bank when we do online banking and deposits. But we’re moving—we’ve already moved some—to a credit union that invests in the local economy and

“What would it mean to do missions from a humble place, recognizing our inability to see much at all as we stumble across boundaries?”

shares more of our values. Banks have gotten too comfortable thinking that they have our eternal loyalty, no matter what they support or how they handle employees.

Here in Denver, Wells Fargo employees were warned that if they spoke to the press about Wells Fargo’s negative involvement in immigrant deportation, they would be fired. I got that directly from a bank worker who was assisting me.

Jeanette Baust
Denver, Colorado

DON’T FORGET HEALTH

Jim Wallis’ “How to Choose a President” (November 2012) was right on in several important respects. However, when he says the administration was content to “work within a broken system to get a *few things* done” (emphasis added), he seems to have ignored the Affordable Care Act. How can that not be considered a significant, politically risky accomplishment? The following pages on “Why Voting Matters” also omit any reference to ensuring quality, affordable health care for poor and other vulnerable people.

Roger Brooks
Madison, Wisconsin

STAY HUMBLE

Referencing a full book in a short article (“Mission: Transformed,” by Michelle García, September-October 2012) can sound stereotypical. But I appreciated Joel Van Dyke and Kris Rocke’s book *Geography of Grace*; it challenged the well-intentioned but hurtful actions we do in the name of Jesus.

I thought their book lined up with Tim Keller’s recent *The Prodigal God* in that both recognize that the kingdom of God offends the “good, blessed, and privileged” older brothers—and we well-intentioned members of the American Christian community are the older brother. It’s not bad to be the older brother. But what would it mean to do missions, and even adoptions, from a humble place, recognizing our inability to see much at all as we stumble across the tracks, cultures, and boundaries?

Steve Osborn
Guatemala City, Guatemala

“But what about ...” Have something to say about an article in this issue of Sojourners? Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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What Comes After the Grief?



WILL THE MASSACRE at Sandy Hook Elementary School touch the nation's soul or just make headlines for a short time? I think that will be up to us who are parents—to respond as parents.

The brutal shooting of 20 6- and 7-year-old schoolchildren in their own classrooms touches all of us, and as the father of two young boys I'm especially struck by the way it touches parents: from the heartbreak of the parents in Newtown to the tears in the eyes of Barack Obama as he responded—not just as the president but also as the father of two daughters—to the faces of the first responders and reporters who are parents. I have felt the pain and seen the look on the face of every parent I have talked with since this horrendous

event occurred. Virtually every mother and father in America has turned their grieving gaze on their own children, realizing how easily this could have happened to them.

The day after the Connecticut massacre, my wife, Joy, and I went to our son Jack's basketball game. The kids on the court were the same ages as the children who were killed. I kept looking at them one by one, feeling how fragile their lives are.

Our first response to what happened in Newtown must be toward our own children: To be so thankful for the gift and grace they are to us. To be ever more conscious of them and what they need from us. To honor the grief of those mothers and fathers in Connecticut who have so painfully lost their children, we must love and attend to ours in an even deeper way.

But we really can't honestly just tell our children that they are safe. This year, children have been randomly shot in their schools, in movie theaters, at malls, and on street corners across the nation—places that any of our kids could be at any time. Our children are not safe.

This crisis will not be solved until we begin a national conversation about what will keep our children safe in this country, at least more safe than they are today.

IN THE WAKE of the tragedy, the nation is grieving. Our church was packed on the next Sunday, as were many congregations across the country. Grieving has brought us together.

But what comes after the grief? What must we as a nation learn from this? What must we change, both personally and in the broader society? How can we make our children safer? These are the questions we must address.

Will we just become numb to horrendous moments like this? Or will this tragedy cause us to ask the hard questions about why these things are happening, and to find the solutions it will take to stop them?

The nation must finally decide what we are going to do about the semi-automatic and automatic weapons that are now pervasive in our country—weapons whose only purpose is to kill large numbers of people. Let's be honest about the difference between these weapons and those needed for hunting, sport, or even self-defense.

Since the Newtown shooting I have learned some stunning facts. In the four counties around the Connecticut school, there are 400 gun dealers. There are more gun dealers now in America than there are McDonald's restaurants. On Black Friday alone, there were

150,000 attempted gun purchases; the FBI fielded 2 million gun-purchase requests in November. And most astounding, there are 310 million people in America and 280 million guns. Guns—and concealed weapons in particular—are being allowed in more and more public places. That is the direction that the gun business and gun lobby have taken us—and the gun business and lobby are now the same thing. Is that the kind of society we want to live in?

BUT IT'S NOT just gun idolatry. We must also do a better job of detecting and treating the kind of mental health problems that are repeatedly leading to such violence. How can we better avoid the deadly connections between mental illness and guns of mass destruction? How do we find, treat, and monitor individuals with such issues, and support their families, in order to protect them and others?

And finally, we need an honest conversation about our growing culture of violence, about the "entertainment" and "products" that project the worst expressions of violence as solutions to problems or as "fun." How do we raise our children in a culture infected with such deep habits of violence? How willing are we to confront those habits and addictions?

There are more gun dealers in America than McDonald's restaurants.

One thing I do know: Washington will not fix these problems. It will have to come from outside of Washington. It will likely come from putting our children first, and not politics. Our children must be our first response to this, and they must inspire a response that lasts. And it likely will have to come from us—as their parents. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners. A version of this appeared on the God's Politics blog.

Arif Ali/AP/Getty Images



The Power of a Girl

Pakistani Christian children attend a prayer service at a church in Lahore on Nov. 11, 2012, for the recovery of Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani teenage girl shot in October by Taliban gunmen in retaliation for her leadership promoting peace and girls' right to education. "It is estimated that education—especially, although not exclusively, girls' education—has been subjected to deliberate attacks in more than 30 countries because of religious, sectarian, political, or other ideological reasons," said U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay. "Malala's bravery in confronting such practices touched a chord internationally."

By Philip Bump

Murky Waters

Want to learn how fracking affects groundwater? Good luck with that.

THE FINGER LAKES region of western New York is one of the most beautiful places on earth. The 11 lakes dangle like a necklace below Lake Ontario, surrounded by hills that are a breathtaking green in summer, red and orange for a flash in the autumn, then snowy white until the cycle repeats. It's an area where the main tension has been of the resident-vs.-renter sort.

This summer, the tension, visibly staked out with lawn signs, was different. The topic: hydraulic fracturing, "fracking" for short. In this process, fluid—primarily water, with some sand and other chemicals—is injected deep underground to break apart shale rock, releasing natural gas and oil. Back at the surface, gas and oil are cleaned and sold; the water mixture is dumped into deep wells.

The procedure has only been made cost-effective in the last decade or so; awareness of retrievable shale oil and gas deposits isn't a whole lot older. Combine the two, and you have an energy boom—one that led natural

gas to nearly overtake coal for electricity production at one point last year.

A key question that has not been definitively answered: Does fracking, compared to the fuel it displaces, increase or decrease

is the extent to which fracking fluid pollutes groundwater. There have been isolated reports of chemicals contained in fracking fluid being found in the wild, including by the EPA in Wyoming last year. Back in 2004,

Congress permanently exempted fracking from regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act—a move championed by then-Vice President Dick Cheney.

greenhouse gas production? Since natural gas, compared to coal, produces significantly less carbon dioxide when burned, cheaper natural gas is one reason why U.S. *carbon dioxide* emissions have gone down significantly of late. But natural gas is primarily *methane*—a gas that is more than 20 times as effective at trapping heat as carbon dioxide. During the fracking process, some of that methane escapes into the atmosphere; there is debate over how much.

Another critical, and contested, question

an initial EPA report found that fracking with diesel fuel posed a risk to groundwater (though the overall verdict of the Bush administration-era agency was that fracking was safe). It's difficult to determine the extent to which such pollution is a problem, because many fracking companies are allowed under state laws to keep the proprietary ingredients of their fluid secret.

At least the states have the ability to ask. In 2005, Congress permanently exempted fracking from regulation under

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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the federal Safe Drinking Water Act—a move championed by then-Vice President Dick Cheney (and later opposed by former EPA officials).

ProPublica, an investigative journalism nonprofit, recently announced that one of the most likely sources of groundwater contamination comes not from the drilling or fracking, but from the disposal of fracking fluid. More than 30 trillion gallons of waste fracking fluid have been injected underground; disposal wells are regularly operated at unsafe pressures. And those wells are, in theory, permanent.

It is not in the fracking companies' interest to answer pollution questions objectively—particularly while fracking wells erupt with money as much as natural gas. New York state recently decided to reset its

entire decision-making process, beginning its scientific analysis again from square one, delaying any decision on whether the state will allow fracking.

In Penn Yan, in the Finger Lakes region, jobs are in short supply, and the local Keuka Lake offers both revenue and pride. This fall, I spoke with an employee of the local Chamber of Commerce to ask if it had taken a position on the roiling fracking debate. I expected an organization of local businesses to be staunchly supportive. The Chamber hadn't taken a position, she explained. As many members opposed fracking as supported it.

With good reason. ■

Philip Bump covers environmental news for Grist magazine.

By Aimee Kang

Love in Action on Valentine's Day

Feb. 14 "One Billion Rising" events aim to end violence against women.

TAMAR'S LIFE COULD have been different. A princess of David's kingdom, she would have married into a wealthy family. But that all changed with the only recorded event of her life, described in 2 Samuel 13: A family member forced himself on her, then turned her out of his room. She cried aloud for all to hear, but the one person who did hear, her brother Absalom, counseled her to not take what happened "to heart."

Rarely preached from the pulpit, this is a story that needs to be heard, because what happened to Tamar happens to one in three women and girls today. They are our mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters, selves—women and girls harmed by violence and silence. Worldwide, violence against women and girls takes many forms: sexual violence, sexual harassment, trafficking, "honor killings," and other forms of murder. Such violence distorts the image of God that is in all of humanity. Victimization is never God's will—fullness of life is. The church needs to help create intentional safe spaces so that healing can begin.

On Feb. 14, 2013, a movement of grassroots, national, and international organizations in more than 170 countries will take part in One Billion Rising, a day of action to reveal the collective strength and

solidarity of those who demand an end to violence against women. Initiated by V-Day, the advocacy group founded by *Vagina Monologues* playwright Eve Ensler, this event invites the world to rise up to stop violence toward women and girls.

The One Billion Rising day of action is an opportunity for the church and faith communities to begin or continue the healing process. And, along with groups and leaders from diverse faith traditions, some Christian groups from around the world have answered the call. For example, in the Philippines, about 50 bishops from the Iglesia Filipina Independiente have pledged to support and join the day of action, a spokesperson for One Billion Rising told *Sojourners*.

In the U.S., church participation runs the theological gamut, from the Salvation Army (whose human trafficking division has signed up, along with five local church-affiliated ministries) to the Episcopal cathedral in New York City, St. John the Divine, which will host a multifaith ceremony on the day of action, and the Catholic Blessed Sacrament Parish community in Hollywood, Calif., which plans a liturgical dance celebration.

One Billion Rising's day of action is

From the Archives

February 1987

Turning from Old Ways

IN THE U.S., the Cold War has served to justify a permanent wartime economy, blacklisting and surveillance of dissenters, and military interventions against smaller and weaker nations from Vietnam to Nicaragua. In the Soviet Union, it has been used to excuse a permanent state of economic austerity, the imprisonment and torture of dissenters, and military interventions from Hungary to Afghanistan. And on both sides the Cold War has provided the ideological underpinning and political momentum for a nuclear arms race that threatens the future of the entire human family. ...

As Christians our faith, security, and hope for a peaceful world can only be placed in the one true God, who is the creator and sustainer of all life and the Lord of history. The first and most essential commandment forbids us to trust the fate of God's earth and generations unborn to the creations of finite, fallible, and fallen human beings.

Throughout the scriptures, we are reminded that peace comes not through amassing military strength and technology but through following in God's ways. Real peace and security can only come through acknowledging the humanity of our enemies, seeking reconciliation with all peoples, and doing justice to the poor and oppressed. Our only escape from total destruction lies in turning from our old ways and going in a whole new direction of peace and cooperation. ■

Danny Duncan Collum was an associate editor of Sojourners when this article appeared.



open-ended, providing room for the church and the faith community to be creative. It can be a day to start a conversation about violence against women. It can be a day to reread scripture and to rediscover the voices

example, women in abusive marriages being counseled to “submit”—too often persist.

As much as she was silenced in her own story, Tamar beckons us all today to seek justice for and with those who suffer violence.

Victimization is never God's will—fullness of life is.

of women. It can be a day to ask our clergy and lay leaders to preach from the pulpit against violence toward women.

The day also provides an opportunity for the church to reassess its own history, teaching, and stance on violence against women and girls. Though significant strides toward gender equality have been made, patriarchal interpretations of scripture explicitly condoning violence against women—for

Her witness calls the church worldwide to hear the Tamars of today and to stand in solidarity with them by demanding an end to violence against women and girls. ■

Aimee Kang, before becoming office manager at Sojourners, served as a youth pastor in Atlanta. She has master's degrees in divinity and theology from Emory University, and is being ordained as a United Methodist deacon.

By Myla Leguro

A Breakthrough Against Violence

Nonviolent Peaceforce and other civilian groups are playing a key role in monitoring the new peace accord in the Philippines.

LAST OCTOBER, A historic breakthrough for peace took place in Mindanao. In this region in the southern Philippines, an armed conflict has persisted for more than four decades, killing 120,000 people and displacing millions. Now, after 15 years of peace negotiations between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, both sides have signed a framework peace agreement.

For generations, Moro (as traditionally Islamic ethnic groups are called here) and indigenous peoples in Mindanao have been politically, economically, and socially left out and marginalized in the Philippines. It is in this context—and the collective desire of the Moro people in Mindanao for self-governance—that both the armed conflict and the peace negotiations took place. The agreement signed in October outlines a pathway toward the establishment of a political entity, Bangsamoro, that will be autonomous, although not fully independent of the Philippines.

The framework agreement is a welcome consolidation of a long-term peace process that has encountered significant challenges, including periods of lackluster support from

the international community and a less-than-successful 1996 peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (from which the Moro Islamic Liberation Front is a breakaway group).

But what hasn't made headlines is how the Bangsamoro agreement is, crucially, born from a creative, powerful, and broad peace constituency—Muslim, Christian, and indigenous; grassroots, middle-range, and top-level—that built an environment in which negotiations could thrive and succeed. On-the-ground work has included peace education, interreligious dialogue, trauma healing, and security-sector reforms, plus work integrating peacemaking with economic development and connecting it to gender issues. Different initiatives have established and sustained “zones of peace,” promoted good governance, strengthened local conflict resolution, and engaged youth. Much-needed support also came from the international community in technical expertise for the negotiations, and will be needed in financial assistance from donor agencies to help bring peace dividends.

In an important and groundbreaking

innovation, the ceasefire that forms part of the agreement is being safeguarded not just by traditional armed peacekeeping contingents, but also by unarmed civil-society groups. Those helping to implement the civilian protection program of the peace process include the international group Nonviolent Peaceforce and the local Mindanao Peoples Caucus, the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center, and the Moslem Organization of Government Employees and Professionals. For such unarmed groups to have status as ceasefire monitors, alongside more traditional peacekeeping forces drawn from national militaries, can offer an example and inspiration to peace processes in conflicts elsewhere in the world.

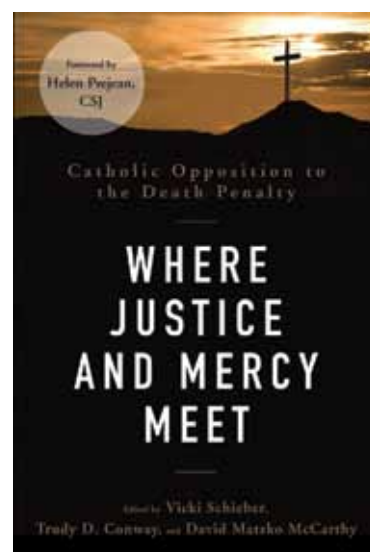
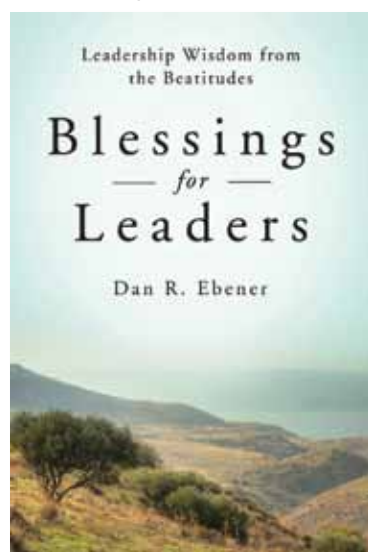
In the wake of the historic signing, the main actors of the peace negotiations have resumed their difficult task of fleshing out the framework agreement, crafting the important annexes on power-sharing, wealth-sharing, and “normalization” (a concept that goes beyond disarmament to include sustainable livelihoods, professional civilian policing, and peaceful political participation).

Just as important as the official negotiations is the bundle of peace efforts being woven by different stakeholders in Mindanao. Local civil-society groups and grassroots communities have continued their creative support to the peace process: They have intensified their efforts to educate about the agreement, and they are planning to directly participate in the transitional processes which will shape Bangsamoro’s legal, governmental, and economic form. A group of women is intent on bringing peace dividends—as large and as fast as possible—into the Bangsamoro area, spurring economic development led by women grassroots entrepreneurs. Indigenous peoples have started to publicly articulate their concern that their distinct identity be recognized within the proposed new political entity.

Mindanao’s peace process efforts continue to unfold amid the feeling of peace—here and now. ■

Myla Leguro has worked for Catholic Relief Services on peace and development projects in Mindanao since 1991. She holds a master’s degree from the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

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Storytelling and Social Change

PERHAPS NO FRAMEWORK has impacted my organization, Interfaith Youth Core, more than Marshall Ganz's approach to public narrative ("leadership storytelling"), best articulated in his March 2009 *Sojourners* article "Why Stories Matter." We use it in our trainings with college student interfaith leaders and recommend it in the workshops we do with university faculty. Most famously, it was employed by the 2008 Obama campaign.

Like all effective frameworks, there is both a visceral and a heady quality to what Ganz teaches. Stories are the way human beings understand and communicate our deepest values, Ganz says, and there are three major stories that leaders must tell. The first is the *story of self*. This is not a selfish activity, or even one just about self-understanding



Marshall Ganz

Kennedy School

story of now—the reason for action, sacrifice, movement, and urgency at this moment above all others.

Young people, Ganz says, are powerfully positioned to practice public narrative, to be leadership storytellers. Drawing on Walter Brueggemann's understanding of the prophetic imagination, Ganz says youth are especially sensitive to both the world's pain and the world's possibility. If they can put that mix of anxiety, frustration, outrage, and hope into stories, a Moses generation will rise and the world, one activist cause at a time, will never be the same.

I know: That sounds optimistic. And 20 years into a vocation of social change, I have to say, I still believe it. The reason is implicit in Ganz's *Sojourners* article and his other writing, although not explicitly called out in the self-us-now framework. Ganz's framework is situated in a hopeful interpretation of the past, one that says the good things we enjoy today—justice, freedom, equality—have been fought for by those who went before. Now, it is our time.

Ganz does this brilliantly by, what else, telling stories. Of how he chose to leave Harvard to join the civil rights movement in Mississippi—a story of self. Of a Jewish tradition that celebrated

freedom through the Passover Seder and abhorred racism because of the horrors of the Holocaust—a story of us. Of African Americans choosing Montgomery in 1955 to make a stand against segregation—a story of an urgent now.

One of the most inspiring things we teach young leaders at Interfaith Youth Core is that they didn't invent interfaith cooperation. We and they are only part of a long tradition, beginning with the imagination of the Creator and continuing through the interfaith leadership of people such as Martin Luther King Jr., the forces of pluralism defeating the forces of prejudice.

Traditions, as Cornel West likes to say, are like the wind at our back. We are lucky that previous generations struggled to send that wind our way, and it is our responsibility to provide it to the next generation. The stories of self-us-now we tell today are simply the next chapter in an overarching narrative of hope, justice, and pluralism. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American. His latest book is *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*.

The stories we tell today are simply the next chapter in an overarching narrative of hope, justice, and pluralism.

(although that is certainly a piece of it). It's about interpreting to others your reasons for being engaged in a struggle. This helps them understand your involvement and, more important, gives them inspiration and language to get active themselves.

The second type of story is the *story of us*. Religions, races, ethnicities, and nations tell such stories brilliantly but often do it in a way that excludes—and makes enemies of—those outside the magic circle. The challenge for the 21st century leader is to tell a story of us that includes people of all backgrounds who are fighting for the same cause. Stories of us build community out of people who would otherwise be strangers.

The third type of story is the



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Dresden's Shrove Tuesday

Deep with one savior's death, how many more?
In observance of which, the Dresden burghers
as usual held Shrove Tuesday circuses
around Our Lady's Church, the Frauenkirche,
eating pancakes before their fast for Easter.

At midnight, Allies drew ash from their firestorm
on a hundred-thousand heads. Remember,
the Good War's firesticks on Dresden's timbers
in revenge for Coventry, where in embers
Ash Wednesday passion plays were once performed,

the old guilds raising monstrance of the Host
from their painted wagons. Remember Churchill
letting Germans bomb Coventry's Cathedral
to protect the broken code, letting death fall
on leafy English streets like flash-bombed ghosts

in Dresden, Tokyo. Remember, we must
beg forgiveness like the medieval poor
for sin. How many miracles of war
must we work, burning flesh to spirit, before
remembering we are dust returned to dust.

Judith Werner lives in Brooklyn Heights, New York.

Photo illustration by Tim Lowly

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Meet Carol—a proud member of the Sojourners Sustainers Circle! Carol first discovered Sojourners when she read Jim Wallis' book *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. She was intrigued by the title and wanted to learn more. Reading the book introduced Carol not only to Jim, but also to Sojourners. Carol has long believed that "all politics are moral politics," so it's no wonder that Carol and Sojourners made a good fit.

"Political decisions affect people's lives, their well-being, and sometimes their very survival, every single day," she says. Carol sees Sojourners' work as an active embodiment of what a living faith should be. Sojourners has given her a strong idea of the connections between faith and social justice: "This is why we are here—to be faithful and grateful custodians of each other, and of all of creation, with generosity, compassion, and respect."

Carol decided to become a Sustainer because Sojourners so clearly aligned with her strong feelings about social impact and political policies. "Sojourners just keeps on the same path, year round, and year after year," she says. "I'm proud to support your work."

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BY DAVID P. GUSHEE
Illustration by Ken Davis

THE U.S. WARFARE STATE AND EVANGELICAL PEACEMAKING

**Evangelicals are gearing up to be makers of peace.
Are they ready for the serious responsibilities that entails?**

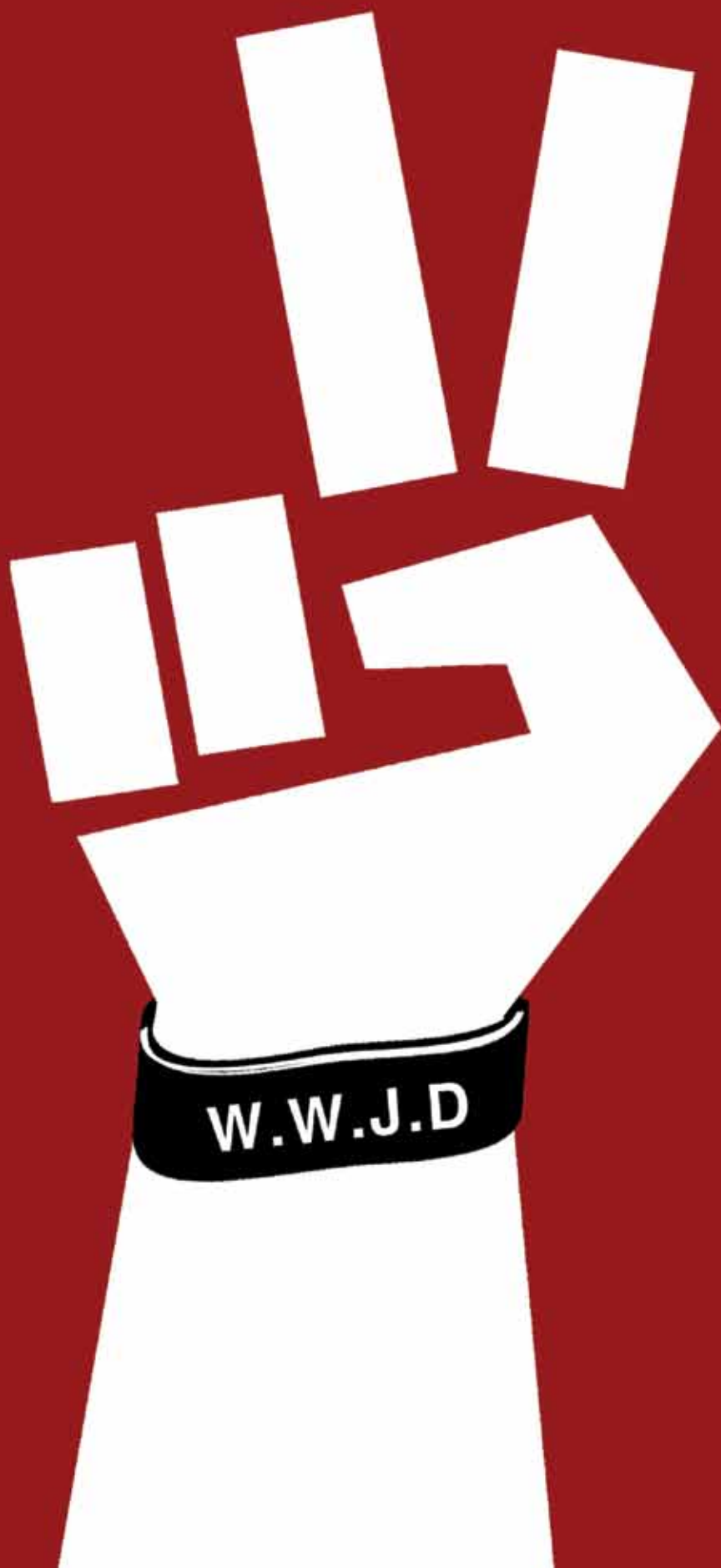
AMID THE COUNTRY'S serious fiscal problems, our \$775 billion annual defense budget, not to mention our tens of billions of dollars spent on intelligence and other national security expenses, is treated as sacrosanct. Budget-cutters, especially on the Republican side, do not train their sights on the defense budget as they seek to address our flood of red ink, but instead focus on dramatic cuts in the safety net for the poor.

According to former Reagan budget director David Stockman, our \$775 billion defense budget is nearly twice as large in inflation-adjusted dollars as the defense budget of Dwight Eisenhower for 1961, during the Cold War. Our FY 2011 defense budget was five times greater than that of China, our nearest competition for this dubious honor; constituted over 40 percent of the world's entire military spending; and was larger than the cumulative budget of the next 14 nations in the top 15. All of this occurs at a time when our infrastructure is crumbling, our schools are sliding, and one-sixth of our population cannot find or has stopped looking for full-time work.

Stockman suggests that no plausible

national defense goals today justify this level of defense spending. He rightly points out that "we have no advanced industrial state enemies" akin to the USSR of Cold War days. He argues that what in fact supports a budget of this size is an ideology of "neoconservative imperialism" and an attempt to function as a "global policeman" even after the world has "fired" us from this role.

Retired U.S. Army Col. Andrew Bacevich argues in several important recent books that the direction of U.S. foreign and military policy is slipping from democratic control. It is instead dominated by a cohort of active and retired military, intelligence, law enforcement, corporate, lobbyist, academic, and political elites whose power in Washington is sufficiently impressive as to foreclose serious reconsideration of what Bacevich calls the "Washington rules." The elites enforcing these rules consistently drive us to policies of permanent war, a staggeringly large global military presence, and regular global interventionism. This analysis stands in striking continuity with the warnings offered 50 years ago by





The Christian voice in U.S. foreign policy debates seems entirely marginalized.

President Eisenhower about the “military-industrial complex.”

While our taste for large boots-on-the-ground military interventions appears finally to have waned after the bloody and bankrupting off-budget wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our special forces, covert, and technological interventions abroad—and the massive, secret national security establishment that supports them—have heightened. Our nation has not had a serious debate about the centralization of presidential authority involved in this

recent shift, including the legitimacy of presidential authority to order long-distance drone strikes—in countries that want such strikes, and in countries that don’t want them.

The United States remains a nation traumatized by 9/11 and its terror attacks. We are easily manipulated into military and covert engagements in the name of post-9/11 national security.

One of the greatest tragedies of the last decade has been the extraordinary burden borne by the small cast of paid (e.g. “volunteer”) soldiers who have been killed or traumatized by our recent wars. We honor them with sentimental displays at airports and ballparks, but seem to have no serious answer for mental health problems that now take 25 veterans’ lives by suicide for every one soldier now dying on the battlefield. And we will be paying their pensions and medical expenses for the next 70 years.

In a trenchant turn of phrase, Stockman suggests that we have developed into a “warfare state” whose military-spending excesses are one major factor contributing to economic decline and imminent fiscal emergency. I believe that Stockman is correct.

THE CHRISTIAN, AND not just evangelical, voice in U.S. foreign policy debates seems entirely marginalized, more so than at any time I have lived through or studied. There is no contemporary Christian leader, scholar, denomination, or movement whose views on U.S. foreign and military policies seem to matter to either party or its leaders.

Just war theory does not seem to be functioning in any significant or

constructive way. In academia, its use seems to have become an empty intellectual exercise divorced from any persuasive power to guide either state policy or Christian practice. The outcome of just war theory reasoning seems tightly linked to the prior ideological or temperamental makeup of the just war theorist.

On the right, anti-Muslim and neo-Crusade thinking has resurfaced in both popular and academic circles, Christian and otherwise. This problem has obviously been exacerbated by the trauma of 9/11 and other acts of Islamist terrorism as well as the stresses of multiple U.S. military engagements in majority-Muslim lands.

Pacifism remains popular in elite academic and popular (progressive) circles. But it has little to offer to public discussion other than occasionally trenchant analyses of obvious excesses or wrongs in U.S. foreign and military policy. And most academic pacifism is untethered to actual Christian communities that practice either nonviolence or any other form of radical Christian discipleship.

Just peacemaking theory offers a profound strengthening of the last-resort criterion of just war theory, as well as highlighting realistic conflict resolution possibilities through creative state and NGO diplomacy and grassroots citizen advocacy and action. It is currently the most relevant of all existing Christian peacemaking theories/strategies, but it would not be accurate to say that it has gained wide influence in U.S. foreign policy circles.

A longstanding coalition strategy within the center-left of evangelicalism has attempted to overcome differences between pacifists and just warriors by emphasizing areas of agreement and shared commitment to just peacemaking. This has protected friendships and produced strategic gains at times, but I wonder whether it has weakened the concreteness, realism, and relevance of evangelical peacemaking efforts, and perhaps obscured the legitimate, principled differences between pacifists and those who believe Christians can sometimes support the use of force.

EVANGELICAL PEACEMAKERS NEED to join the conversation about U.S. foreign and military policy, such as it is. That includes



studying U.S. foreign policy goals, our current military presence around the world, our alliance commitments, existing and planned weapons systems, and finally how all of that is reflected in the U.S. defense budget. We also need to become aware of the various political, civic, and economic forces that block needed budget cuts in defense even when foreign policy and governmental leaders believe those cuts are needed. This is a formidable research agenda calling for the emergence of a new generation of ethics specialists in this area.

What would it mean to offer our own proposals, or join with those of others, for the kind of foreign policy, use of military force, and size and shape of defense budget that we *could* support? This would require a willingness on our part to accept a legitimate national right of self-defense and use of lethal force under certain specified conditions. It would also involve consideration once again of the morality of maintaining military forces and weapons of sufficient scope to deter aggressors. In other words, we would have to decide whether there is such a thing as “national security” that can find a place within a Christian approach and, if so, how a legitimate national security is best garnered and protected.

To do the above would involve accepting, at least provisionally, the stubborn existence of an entity called the nation-state, a world filled with an ever-shifting array of nation-states, and the internationally recognized right of those states to defend themselves. That is one price of admission to the conversation about how much defense to buy, for what purposes, etc. Currently in academia there is much critique of modernity, including the hegemony of the nation-state and its use of violence. This is really quite interesting, but meanwhile we live in a world with 190-plus nation-states, including our own, all of which are committed to defending themselves.

I suggest we need a swing back toward consideration of the difference between an ethic for Christian disciples and an ethic for the leaders of nations, states, political communities. The state is not the church. Even though I believe that the church *qua* church is called to be a nonviolent community, the state *qua* state cannot be a nonviolent

community—though it can be called to exercise its security responsibilities as non-violently as possible. The church can urge peace, we can pioneer peacemaking practices, and we can place ourselves at risk in order to create reconciliation opportunities between peoples and nations. But we must take seriously once again the classic conundrum that the statesperson, even the Christian statesperson, faces responsibilities involving the use of force in relation to protecting the people within his or her realm that others generally do not (cf. Romans 13:1-7). That is what U.S. military, intelligence, and diplomatic operatives do, and are supposed to be doing, even if their current mission needs dramatic trimming.

WHAT IF THE thinking of U.S. center-left Christians, including evangelicals, has been somewhat misshaped by the increasingly obvious wrongs of U.S. foreign and military policy for the last 65 years, including the first use of nuclear weapons in 1945, the insane nuclear arms race with its Mutual Assured Destruction madness, the deployment and planned use of nuclear weapons in various theaters of war, the foolish conventional-but-devastating wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere, and the bloating of our military budget as outlined earlier?

What if because U.S. foreign and military policy has been potentially lethal to the planet, as well as bankrupting, unwise, and neo-imperialistic, this reality has obscured for us historic issues in Christian thinking about war that go back at least as far as Ambrose? What if we simply haven’t had to deal with the most basic and ancient questions about whether or how peoples on this planet legitimately defend their lives against aggressors, because until the recent domestic terror attacks this was not the most urgent question when thoughtful Christians engaged U.S. foreign policy? These are at least the questions raised for me as I consider the nexus between the U.S. warfare state and evangelical peacemaking. ■

David P. Gushee is the Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University. This article is adapted from his presentation at the September 2012 Evangelicals for Peace conference in Washington, D.C.

Evangelical peacemakers need to join the conversation about U.S. foreign and military policy, such as it is.





A HEART FOR PEACE

The surprising new surge in evangelical peacemaking.

A VARIETY OF EVANGELICAL PEACEMAKING efforts have sprung up in recent years, from the Two Futures Project, which seeks a world without nuclear weapons, to the World Evangelical Alliance's Peace and Reconciliation Initiative, which seeks to redress the fact that "in our zeal for evangelism, we have often overlooked the biblical mandate to pursue peace."

This fall, evangelicals from a range of viewpoints gathered at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., exploring what a distinctive evangelical contribution to peacemaking might look like. The essays below, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the first Evangelicals for Peace conference, a "summit on Christian moral responsibility in the 21st century." Organizers hope to publish a book with the entire collection of talks.





'All the Easy Jobs Have Been Done'

Standing on a rich tradition of peace and transformation • *By Geoff Tunncliffe*

WHY IS PEACEMAKING an important topic for evangelicals? As a global community of 600 million Christians, our churches are confronted daily with the impact of illegal weapons. Our hospitals treat the victims of violence. Our church leaders counsel the traumatized. All forms of conflict negatively impact our development programs. Our aid agencies seek to care for and rehabilitate child soldiers. Our inner-city communities are confronted with the outcomes of gang warfare.

For all of us who say we are followers of Jesus, as we observe or experience the brokenness of our world, it should break our hearts. If we feel the pain so deeply, I can't imagine what our loving God feels. The One who is called the Prince of Peace. The One who laid down his life, so that we could be reconciled to God and each other.

The World Evangelical Alliance's engagement in peacemaking stands on the rich traditions of evangelicals who have devoted themselves to being instruments of social change and transformation. We want to say loudly that we evangelicals want to be on the forefront of peacebuilding. All the easy jobs have been done. It's just the tough ones that are left. It requires clear vision to face these challenges.

We as evangelicals are committed to working together with those in and outside our community for the good of all. May God empower us through the work of his Spirit to be his ambassadors of peace and reconciliation. ■

Geoff Tunncliffe is secretary general of the World Evangelical Alliance.

Following the Prince of Peace

The six spheres of evangelical peacemaking

• *By Rick Love*

WHAT WOULD A biblical, comprehensive, proactive peace witness look like? The challenge for us is to begin with peace with God. What does that mean practically? It means peace with ourselves, peace within the church, peace with our neighbor, and ultimately peace with our enemies. The reality is, life is not a nice sequence like this, or a continuum, but this is where Jesus wants to move all of us. If we are going to be an evangelical movement that stresses a biblical, comprehensive, and proactive peace, then we need to train our people in all these dimensions.

Here are six spheres of how we could do this as evangelicals. The first sphere is personal peace ("Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts"). I think that should be the foundation for evangelical peacemakers. Then it moves to interpersonal (Go and be reconciled in our homes and our churches). Then there's social peacemaking ("Take the log out of your own eye"). Next there is urban. As Jeremiah wrote, "Seek the peace of the city." How can we, as evangelicals, seek the common good, seek the peace of the city? And then it moves to national and, ultimately, international peacemaking. Each of these spheres builds on another, and shows the complexities that we face today. I believe that evangelicals around the world need to be engaged in each of these spheres. We want to help followers of the Prince of Peace be a more effective force for peace in our world today. ■

Rick Love, organizer of the Evangelicals for Peace conference, is president of Peace Catalyst International.





Believing in Redemption

The way Jesus responded to terror is a lesson to all of us • By Lisa Sharon Harper

JESUS STARED INTO the faces of people who considered him their enemy, and he turned his other cheek. He allowed himself to be whipped. He allowed a terrorist state to use his death as a horrifying warning to any who dare follow him from this point on: Declaring allegiance to Jesus will be deemed a direct challenge to the deity of Caesar and to the ultimate authority of occupying Rome. Do so upon pain of death.

Why didn't Jesus fight? After all, that's what the people wanted. They had been waiting for a Messiah to overthrow Caesar by force and take back the Promised Land. Why did he choose the route of silent, nonviolent resistance with Pilate, rather than lashing out or arguing his case? Why did Jesus turn the other cheek and exercise meekness, which means disciplined power, in the face of terror?

I believe it was because when he looked into the eyes of the chief priests or their slaves or the Roman soldiers, or even Caesar himself, he saw the image of God. How could Jesus strike down the image of God? He came to redeem and restore the image of God on earth, to set the slaves, and the soldiers, and the priests free from the violent reign of humans. He came that Caesar himself might be brought back to life by the dominion of God—a dominion characterized by disciplined power, servant leadership, truth-telling, just dealing, reconciliation and reparation, and, above all else, love. Jesus did not fight because he believed in redemption. ■

*Lisa Sharon Harper is director of mobilizing at Sojourners. Her presentation at the Evangelicals for Peace conference was adapted from her book *Left, Right, and Christ: Evangelical Faith in Politics* (with D.C. Innes, Russell Media, 2011).*

Become Doers of Peace

Jesus does not allow us simply to spiritualize peacemaking • By Tyler Wigg-Stevenson

UNFORTUNATELY, WHEN Christians disdain peace, it is a clear triumph of cultural religion over biblical fidelity, because peace is at the core of what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus is the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). The good news that he died for sinners is itself the "gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15), because the purpose of the cross was to "[make] peace through his blood" (Colossians 1:20). His peace is to "rule" among us, "since as members of one body you were called to peace" (Colossians 3:15). And, though Paul begins his letters to the churches by pairing "grace and peace," I wonder if most of us hear far more about grace than peace from our churches' pulpits. Despite the clear biblical witness, many Christians resist peace.

Peace is more than the absence or cessation of war. But neither does Jesus allow us simply to spiritualize peace. Though the peace of Christ is internal, it does not remain internal. Otherwise, how can we make sense of his exaltation in the Beatitudes of the highly active work of the "peacemaker," which literally combines the Greek words for "peace" and "to make or create" (Matthew 5:9)? Jesus does not bless the peace-feelers or the peace-talkers, but the peace-doers. ■

*Tyler Wigg-Stevenson is founding director of the Two Futures Project, a movement of Christians for the abolition of nuclear weapons. This is adapted with permission from his forthcoming book, *The World is Not Ours to Save* (© 2013, InterVarsity Press, PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515; www.ivpress.com).*





Sharing the Bed

Pastors and peacemaking in a globalized world

• By Bob Roberts Jr.

THE WORLD IS open like never before, but sadly we are becoming our own worst enemies. The biggest obstacle to us engaging the world with our faith is us. Though we have been contemporizing the church in the West, we still have an old worldview of faith and how it engages the world.

For the most part, we evangelicals have had our “religious” response to peace and foreign affairs, but it isn’t enough. Without the Holy Spirit and personal relationships with people from challenging countries, we will be just another group banding together wanting peace. Wanting peace is not enough; we must promote it, and we promote it through relationships.

The reality is we cannot truly discuss theology without legitimate relationships, unless all we want is academia. The greatest thing a pastor can do is to mobilize and equip his or her church to engage the world. The greatest power of a pastor is to connect his or her people with people of other faiths.

What we desperately need is a global perspective. Whether it’s the economy, oil, foreign affairs, environment, or statecraft, we Americans sadly see through a purely American or local lens. This is my biggest concern for my country: We don’t realize how we are contributing to the tension in the world; we think it’s other people, and often it’s us. We’re hogging the bed without realizing others are about to fall off. ■

Bob Roberts Jr. is founder and senior pastor of NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas.

Sparking “Aha” Moments

Social media can transport us to places that we couldn’t otherwise go • By Jennifer Crumpton

IT’S ESSENTIAL THAT we exert our evangelical voices—for peace, respect, religious understanding, cooperation, reconciliation—into the popular political and social discourse that’s going on about foreign policy in war and conflict. We have to really understand that we live in two dimensions now. We have our real-time, academic, pastoral activism world, but then we also have another realm in which we can touch people in the world that we have never been able to touch before. We can have a voice in places that we have never been able to have a voice before, with people that we would never otherwise meet.

We really cannot underestimate the power of social media to spark “aha” moments. When we think in terms of iconic change over time—the big moments in our national history and the history of the world—all of those moments start with tiny little moments: little conversations, little dialogues, little quotes from a summit that you’re sitting at. Conversations that otherwise wouldn’t have happened—those are what create iconic change, where the world will never be the same.

Social media is kind of like the Holy Spirit. It can transport us to places that we couldn’t otherwise go. It can help us interact with people that we wouldn’t have otherwise, in ways that we wouldn’t have even dreamed of. So let’s go with it. With social media, we all have a pulpit. A lot of the time, we want to come down from the pulpits and get into the streets, and social media is a way to get into a lot of streets that we couldn’t otherwise travel down. ■

Jennifer Crumpton, a pastoral associate at Park Avenue Christian Church in Manhattan, is the founding editor of “Uncommon Voices,” the blog of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good.





On Not Fighting with the Enemy's Weapons

When her brother was killed by terrorists, she had a choice to make • By Lisa Gibson

IN 1988, MY brother Ken was killed in the terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Ken was 20 years old at the time and was serving in the Army in Berlin, Germany.

I was only 18 years old when my brother was killed. The question that God placed on my heart, after all the dust settled, was simply this: “How might I be a part of seeing this tragedy redeemed and see some good come out of it?”

Now, after more than 20 years, I know what it is to wage the battle in the physical and the spiritual realms. For years I was simply indifferent. I didn’t know any Muslims, and that was the way I wanted to keep it. As a Christian, I knew it was wrong to hate and that I was called to forgive. But as I read the Bible, I was challenged because I learned it was more than not hating my enemy—it was about loving them. At the heart of terrorism is hate and fear. The only way to effectively fight the battle is to walk in the opposite spirit. Too many Christians are trying to fight the battle with the enemy’s weapons. Where there is hate, we must respond in love. Where there is fear, we must respond in faith.

Rather than succumbing to bitterness or simple indifference, I chose to respond in love. With the realization that love is an action, I began to look for opportunities to reach out in love to my enemies. ■

*Lisa Gibson is founder and executive director of the Peace and Prosperity Alliance and author of *Life In Death: A Journey From Terrorism To Triumph*.*



Following the Healer of Healers

How evangelicals can be catalysts for peace in the Holy Land • By Sami Awad

HOW CAN EVANGELICALS be a catalyst for peace in the Holy Land? The focus must be on what Jesus wants us to do, not on what we want to do—we must see how Jesus wants us to move forward in this. What is the language that he wants us to speak to those that are suffering, and to those who are committing the suffering as well? It’s very easy for us to dehumanize those who cause suffering. We always need to ask the question: Is this the style of Jesus? Is this how Jesus would talk to the oppressor?

For anything to move forward in the Holy Land, a relationship of trust and respect must be established between the peoples. Peace is not just negotiated agreements between politicians. Peace is the process of building trust and respect between the peoples of the land. To be able to see each other with new eyes. To be able to really understand who the “other” is. To appreciate them—their culture, their heritage, the narrative that they bring to the table. Trust and respect are the foundations.

Religion Matters

In foreign policy, ignoring the motivating influence of religious faith is a sure recipe for failure

• By Douglas M. Johnston

IF I HAD to convey a single message to U.S. foreign policy practitioners, it would be that religion matters. For good or for ill, religion is increasingly important in our world. What’s more, the nature of religion in many places is changing; it is becoming more dynamic, more activist, and more political. While the majority of religious movements are peaceful, some errant ideologies are at work justifying and encouraging violence. These ideologies must be countered, and countered effectively. Military force can never fully protect us from the type of terrorist assaults that have taken place over the past decade. Ideologies must be countered with ideas, and ideologies steeped in religion need to be challenged on religious grounds.

These days, in almost any foreign policy situation, ignoring the motivating influence of religious faith is a sure recipe for failure. Because so many terrorists, like those that struck the United States on 9/11, derive their legitimacy from extremist interpretations of their religion, the most effective counter is to empower the more tolerant, mainstream beliefs of that religion, especially among those communities most at risk of succumbing to violent propaganda. Although radical Islam is at the forefront of most religious conversations today, the lessons to be learned from combating extremism in an Islamic context apply equally well to any conflict having a religious dimension to it. ■

Douglas M. Johnston is president and founder of the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy.

We are called to love our enemies. No matter what we think or feel, no matter how much anger we have in us, we are called to love our enemies. And for me, my biggest challenge has been to understand exactly who my enemy is, in order for me to love them. As a Palestinian, as a Christian, the most transformative experience for me has been going to places like Auschwitz and Birkenau and understanding who my enemy is. To understand the Holocaust, to understand the suffering, the pain, and the fear that exists within the Jewish community. The only thing that you can do after that experience is to love them more, to have real compassion for them and real understanding of where they came from and where they are now—and what is needed for us, as Christians, to follow the healer of all healers. ■

Sami Awad is founder and executive director of Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem, Palestine.

Aren't We Supposed to Be Peacemakers?

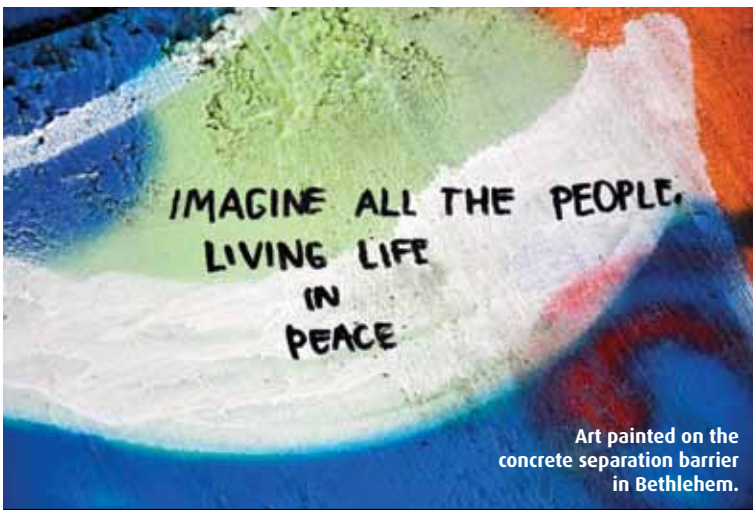
DURING THE BALKAN war of the early '90s, I traveled twice to Bosnia and Croatia. I visited middle-class women whose husbands and sons had been brutally killed. I visited a refugee center filled with people who had lost everything and were at the mercy of any country that would take them in. I visited school children suffering from post-traumatic stress after seeing their parents killed by enemy shells that landed in their homes.

I walked through the rubble of Mostar, where the Friendship Bridge—a massive stone structure named in honor of the many ethnic groups that had crossed it for four centuries—had been bombed and destroyed. In city after city, I saw the destruction of architecture, art, museums—a violent erasure of the cultures that had thrived there.

Wherever I go in the world, I want to be quick to listen to differing perspectives and slow to pick sides.

It was the first time I had seen war up close, and I was shocked by what human beings do to each other.

While I traveled in the Balkans, another war was waged in Rwanda by Hutus against Tutsis—what we now refer to as the Rwandan genocide. Since 2009 I've traveled twice to the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the ethnic battles forged in Rwanda crossed borders and continue to this day. As usual in war, civilians pay the highest price. Subsistence farmers in small villages want only to live in peace, tend their crops, and feed their families. Instead, their crops are burned, wives and daughters are raped, and many become slave labor in Congolese mines that provide minerals for our cell phones and wealth for the violent criminals



Christine Anderson

who control the mines.

Shortly after first visiting Congo, I went to Israel and walked slowly through the halls of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. I've walked those horrifying halls numerous times as I've hosted American Christians who want to learn more about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. We can't understand the present without exploring the past, so we visit Yad Vashem. We also meet with Israeli citizens who have lost family and friends to the violence of Palestinian extremists.

And we visit Arab families who lost their homes and lands in 1948 as a result of the founding of the state of Israel. We visit Palestinians in the West Bank who have lived under the harsh realities of Israeli military occupation since 1967. We meet with Israeli human rights activists who advocate on behalf of the desperately poor and marginalized Palestinians of Gaza.

All these meetings are heartbreaking.

I went to college to be a social worker and volunteered for years in ministries that serve the poor. Along the way, I ended up in places

of violent conflict where I encountered heartbreaking realities: mothers weeping as they send their sons and daughters into harm's way; civilian men, women, and children killed in indiscriminate cross-fire; the infrastructure for essential human services going up in flames. I learned that every good work we do is undone by war. However earnest our acts of compassion and our fight for justice, our efforts will be futile if there is no peace.

Because of this, I am devoting myself to peacemaking. Wherever I go in the world, I want to be quick to listen to differing perspectives and slow to pick sides. I want to do my best to understand complexity and avoid simplistic answers. I want to raise funds for refugees and other victims of violence, and protest—to whatever extent I can—the escalating costs of war.

If I were a pragmatist, I might not bother to do this. But I am a follower of Jesus. As such, I don't think I can do otherwise. ■



Lynne Hybels, co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, is author of *Nice Girls Don't Change the World*.

BY TOYA RICHARDS

BULLET-PROOF GOSPEL

Death threats haven't stopped Rev. James Byensi, a Congolese pastor, from seeking peace in his homeland.

EACH DAY REV. JAMES BYENSI seeks the face of God in one of the world's deadliest places, an environment where rape has been used as a weapon, children have had their innocence stolen, and the church of Jesus Christ is called to stand in the gap.

He lives in Bunia, a town on the eastern edge of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). And while only the largest events of the DRC's conflict—such as the M23 militia's takeover of Goma, a city 300 miles south of Bunia—make world headlines, every day Byensi engages his community and country as an active agent of peace. For example, recently he helped deter a cycle of violence from escalating in his hometown. “Even as I write, I have just received a call from the mayor to join him in talking to a group of people who are protesting against the killing of their brother last night,” Byensi told *Sojourners* in October in one of several email interviews. “The killers were one of the rebel groups operating in the area surrounding Bunia.” While advocacy against violence is a cause close to Byensi's heart, the protest itself threatened to become part of the problem: “Protest in this area is always violent and followed by looting or even rape,” he explained. The result of that meeting was that Byensi and the mayor together “devised the way to address the people and cool them down,” which included the mayor's office helping the bereaved citizens with burial expenses.

That is the kind of advocacy and justice work Byensi does on a daily basis as a leadership and conflict-management consultant and trainer, and through the nonprofit he founded, the Rebuilders Ministry.

Such work is urgently needed in the DRC. Since 1996, civil wars have plagued the central African country, claiming more than 6 million innocent lives, Byensi said. Currently, in eastern Congo where he is located, there are more than 34 armed groups fighting,

Finbarr O'Reilly/Reuters

Women displaced by fighting and the constant fear of rape await aid delivery at a refugee camp in eastern Congo.







Benjamin Basendu

“Fighting corruption and discouraging rebellion are always risky.”

Above, Rev. James Byensi preaches in his home town of Bunia, in the eastern part of the war-ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo.

he explained, including the M23 movement, Allied Democratic Forces, the ethnically based Front for Patriotic Resistance of Ituri, Mayi Mayi groups, and the infamous Lord’s Resistance Army. “In the DRC, we have so many militia groups,” Byensi says, which act as “structured bandits, looting people and the country.”

Some of Byensi’s own family members have been victims of the ongoing horrific violence, including his mother. “I must admit that it is not easy. Having lost 16 relatives in this past war and having to care for 11 orphans with my meager salary is a great challenge,” Byensi said. “I live in constant fear and pressure.”

He hasn’t let the challenges stop him. Byensi is an advising member of a mediation team working with the government to convince the main rebel chief in the Ituri District to stop his activities and join the regular armed forces of the country. “This is a very complex process because of the interference we are getting from both the national and international bodies that don’t like peace to return to the region,” he said.

He’s referring in part to Rwanda and Uganda, which have been described by United Nations experts as supporting

different rebel groups in the DRC. (Both countries have denied the accusations.)

Quite simply, Byensi’s justice and advocacy work is often a matter of life and death for him and those around him. “Our activities, especially fighting corruption and discouraging rebellion, are always very risky, since people take them personally,” he said.

Last year, for example, death threats were made against Byensi because he denounced, in church and in the presence of some political leaders, the embezzlement of funds intended for the construction of town roads as well as unfulfilled promises for electricity and water supply.

“For weeks I had to live in hiding,” he said. Still Byensi, who is newly married, perseveres: “My coping strategy is prayer and courage, facing challenges one step at a time, and total dependence on God for provision and wisdom.”

That is not easy in the DRC, the second largest country in Africa, with a population of more than 71 million people. The former Belgian colony has had a tumultuous history, including colonial victimization and the monstrous civil unrest that continues today.

“We are faced with multiple challenges,” said Byensi of his homeland. HIV infection

is propagated by armed forces as well as civilians, and there is an increase of cases and a lack of drugs. The nation faces 85 percent unemployment, according to Byensi, and a lack of basic structures such as roads, hospitals, and good schools. Also, as he said, corruption is endemic; the courts deliver “justice” for the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and weak, often prompting the poor to take matters into their own hands.

And, as is all too common in conflict-torn countries, sexual violence is used as a weapon of war to humiliate and discourage the population; at least 200 women are raped every month in Byensi’s region of the country alone. A 2011 study published by *The American Journal of Public Health* estimated that nearly 2 million women have been raped in the DRC and that women are victimized at a rate of nearly one every minute.

Earlier this year Byensi organized a two-day training session with pastors in Bunia to address sexual violence. “Our main speaker was the district chief magistrate, who took the opportunity to teach pastors about the new country laws on sexual violence,” Byensi said. The DRC passed a law in 2006 introducing amendments to its penal code that provide protection against sexual violence. The law outlaws such things as rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation, and sexual relations with children under 18.

Byensi also is currently accompanying a pastor whose 10-year-old daughter has been sexually abused by a 25-year-old man. “We denounce what is not right.”

BYENSI CALLS ON the United States to do what is right by the Democratic Republic of Congo. “The U.S. can help by making our government accountable, but also by discouraging neighboring countries from interfering with Congo’s affairs,” he said. “The American church and other entities can partner with us in these efforts we are making. We invite them to pray for us, visit with us, as well as support us in whatever capacity they can.”

Byensi proclaims in his ministry the sovereignty of God—which he can do so well, he says, because he knows it personally. The 37-year-old Congo native, who grew up in a village with no electricity or running water, came to believe in Jesus when he was 12. In 1998, he felt called to

ministry. For a time, he pursued preaching part-time while also running a food business he had started; his goal was to make enough money to attend law school. Then his business collapsed. “God had already warned me three times to stop my business and join full-time ministry, which I refused,” Byensi said. “After the incident, I had no choice but to surrender to the Lord’s will, which I have never regretted.”

Over the years he has served as a youth pastor, an associate pastor, and a senior pastor. Today Byensi, who holds a bachelor’s degree in theology and a master’s degree in leadership studies from the Nairobi

“My coping strategy is total dependence on God.”

International School of Theology, serves as missions director for the Evangelical Church in Central Africa, where he oversees more than 1,400 churches. (The denomination, currently celebrating its centennial, is an outgrowth of the Africa Inland Mission, a nondenominational missionary organization started in the U.S. in the 1890s.) Byensi said he is involved in preaching, teaching, counseling, and training thousands of people on an interdenominational level, nationally and internationally.

Rebuilders Ministry, the nonprofit he founded, was started in Nairobi, Kenya, where Byensi was doing his theological training. Rebuilders engages in a variety of activities, including organizing interdenominational leadership conferences, seminars, and trainings with church and political leaders, women, and youth.

“The Rebuilders was born to respond to multiple leadership, peace, and social challenges faced by the DRC after its decade of unceasing wars,” he said. “Since its launch in December 2006, the Rebuilders has had tremendous impact through the church and the community we serve.”

BYENSI’S REBUILDERS business card quotes, in French (the DRC’s official language), Nehemiah 2:17: “Come, let us rebuild ... so that we may no longer suffer disgrace.” Among the organization’s goals are to challenge leaders and build up their capacities, reach out to vulnerable women

and children, rebuild destroyed infrastructures, and equip a new generation of leaders for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Rebuilders’ successes at a grassroots level include joining with Byensi’s church to sponsor school fees for 35 children in primary or high school, and paying tuition for two university students. The ministry has sponsored construction of two buildings to house street children; of the 65 street children with whom Rebuilders has worked, 35 have been reunited with their families. The ministry has helped 70 at-risk women become trained in sewing, knitting, and crocheting, and has a revolving microloan program that’s cur-

rently helping 20 elderly women earn their livelihoods with small businesses. Rebuilders has also helped reconstruct 24 churches that were damaged or destroyed by the DRC’s armed conflict.

The organization also works through public peace and evangelistic meetings, food distribution, and conflict mediation. The ministry’s vision is to see the Democratic Republic of Congo thrive spiritually, socially, economically, and politically, he said.

“We focus our efforts on teaching and training in the area of leadership and good governance; we plead with the local government and justice [officials] whenever there is a need; we advise both the church and local leadership,” Byensi said. Also, “we do a lot of lobbying with national and international non-governmental organizations to assist; and we fight against rape, corruption, and injustice through public statements and meeting concerned authorities.”

As he navigates the many difficulties of peacemaking and working to make a difference in the DRC, Byensi holds fast to a treasured Bible passage. “In the midst of numerous challenges I face daily, I need a positive confession day by day,” he said. “My favorite scripture is Philippians 4:13: ‘I can do everything through the one who strengthens me.’” ■

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BY ANNE MARIE RODERICK and JOSHUA WITCHGER

'RELEVANCE' IS NOT ENOUGH

**Many young adults are leaving the church these days.
Two 20-somethings reflect on what keeps them in the pews.**

LAST FALL, I (Anne Marie) decided to take a break from the church I had been attending to check out a nearby Episcopal service with one of my housemates, Joshua. I had no idea at the time that this might turn into a permanent switch. My Baptist, Anabaptist, and evangelical roots don't quite explain what drew me to St. Stephen's Church that Sunday, but I remember the thought that kept going through my head: *I need to take Communion.*

For a number of reasons, I had been feeling apathetic toward Christian faith. I needed something official and visceral to cleanse me of the growing indifference I felt. The thought entered my mind: *I need some bread and wine, because if my own prayers can't kindle the spirit of Jesus within me, then I'll get him in there by force.* I hoped that partaking in the real-deal-flesh-and-blood would allow me to return to my own church in peace.

I can't say that the Episcopal service that day cured me of all my doubts and frustrations about Christianity, but I did find meaning in the liturgy, rituals, and traditions that continued to sustain me in my first year in a new city. As Joshua and I continued to attend St. Stephen's, we each reflected on what we, as young adults, are looking for in church and Christian community.

Church advertisements often focus on how to keep young people "engaged," and there are countless new books about why young people are leaving the church. Statistics show decreased church attendance among those in our generation, and while this may be cause

for concern, I'm not too worried about it. I'm glad that churches and denominations are interested in engaging young people, but so often this well-meaning desire is rooted in fear and anxiety about the future of the church. *Is Christianity becoming obsolete? Will the church die away?*

News flash: Christianity isn't going anywhere. But churches and denominations may have to adapt—and not necessarily the way they're doing so now—if they are to survive.

As 20-somethings who've left the cocoons of family and college for our first forays into the "real world," we have two basic conclusions about what we are looking for in church communities.

1) I want to be part of something larger than myself.

JOSHUA: During my early teens, the Lutheran church in which I was raised set apart one of its three services for "contemporary" worship. Out with the formal liturgy, because it becomes stale and limits the expression of faith—that was the reasoning. Trade in the hymnals for a projector screen, clerical vestments for a shirt and tie, and the creeds for a few extra songs or an extended sermon. It soon became the most-attended service.

Until my senior year of high school, I loved it. I could connect with God, unhindered by formal recitations and structures. But transcendence—the quality of stretching beyond ourselves to connect with a

getty images



greater history and meaning—was missing.

During my college years, this concept of transcendence became real to me as I interacted with the Book of Common Prayer. Together with my community, I would recite the ancient affirmations of faith and engage in timeless rites and rituals that remind the church of its shared vision, the hope to which we aspire.

The wonderful thing about transcendence is that it scoops us up locally and globally, backward and forward. As I participate in a liturgical service, I am investing

bread and wine. It was about a deep need to connect with God and others beyond myself.

Young adulthood is all about finding and establishing identity. As we transition from the support and constraints of childhood, young people are enmeshed in the age-old questions: *Who am I? What is my purpose in life?* Today young adult culture is “aided” by external mechanisms that craft and reinforce personal identity. We are bombarded with opportunities to establish our individual personalities, believing the false notion that what we buy and how we appear defines

Help young adults like me to stay rooted; give us space to find meaning; listen to our stories.

in the local community, making peace with those I see on a regular basis, lifting up prayers of joy and concern week after week, and communing around ancient symbols of nourishment and sustenance. This practice of gathering around a common structure has historically guided the global church and continues to direct us today, giving these words and rituals enduring meaning.

I don't believe that transcendence can only be found in high-church traditions, but there is great value in holding on to practices that have sustained large portions of the church for so long. When we try to create something new, we often think we must discard the old. Right now, nothing in this phase of my life is stable. Everything is in transition. I find comfort in church communities with strong, deep roots. There is always room for picking and pruning, but the ancient rituals of liturgy, common prayer, and Communion remind me that I, too, have roots. I am not just a stumbling 20-something trying to find my place in the world. I am part of something greater.

ANNE MARIE: While many congregations modify their music, order of worship, and sermon topics in an attempt to make church “relevant” for newer generations, I am more interested in figuring out how I fit into the rich and complicated tradition of Christianity than in asking how Christianity can be molded to meet my needs. My desire to receive Communion at St. Stephen's that day wasn't about the individual act of taking

us. We can tell our online social network what we like, but the tough work of understanding who we are—as individuals and in relation to God and others—has been replaced by the ability to maintain a one-dimensional identity via Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media.

Don't get me wrong. I have a Facebook account and I use it. But when I go to church, I turn off my phone. I let go of my individual or virtual claim on identity. Christian tradition teaches us that we exist not only as individuals, but as members of a body much larger than our own. When I participate in Communion, I experience a visceral connection to the centuries of history behind me and the future of the church before me. My faith and identity in Christ is bound to others.

2) I want to find my own meaning in Christian faith and practice.

JOSHUA: I have been taking Communion at church ever since I was confirmed in sixth grade. And for nearly as long, I've been baking my own bread, too. I learned from my mom how to prepare the yeast just right so that the bread will rise and produce the loaf. I remember watching her in the kitchen, mixing the flour, finding the right temperature for the water, kneading the dough, waiting, kneading again, and waiting some more. After it baked and cooled, my family would share bread together over dinner.

It wasn't until college, though, that I

made the connection between Communion and my family's bread-making. I was living in a house off-campus with some of my friends and another tenant, an older guy we called J.C. One day J.C. showed up at the front door, beaten and bloody. “Can you call the police?” he asked. “Some guys just beat me up.” We were scared at first. We called the police and got ice packs to soothe his swollen face. But then all we could do was wait.

With all the commotion I almost forgot that I had bread baking upstairs. When I took it out of the oven, I didn't even wait for it to cool. I took the loaf in one hand, some homemade jam in the other, and brought it to J.C. We broke bread together, and somehow our fear, J.C.'s battered face, and all the frustrations we had endured with each other as neighbors came into perspective.

Since that night, making bread and sharing it with others has become a holy time for me. The process of bread-making, of intentionally preparing and slowly waiting for it to ferment and grow, is the most accessible way I have learned to practice church in my own life. If I happen to not attend church, I know that I can still participate in holy Communion.

This is the greater meaning of church, isn't it? We are blessed when we receive the body and blood of Jesus—through Communion, sermons, songs, liturgy, the prayers of our neighbors—and it is our job to continually share that spirit in our daily lives. But there are also other ways to become more-whole spiritual beings.

No person's experience holds precedence over any other. The beauty of the communion of saints is that we all bring holiness to the table. Whether through experiences in nature, the arts, or sports—no one has a hold on that authenticity. And the church is better for it.

ANNE MARIE: During college I attended my first Maundy Thursday “love feast.” All I knew about the service was what someone at church had told me: *It's a celebration of the Last Supper. Oh, yeah, and there's foot-washing.*

As I prepared to attend this Communion service, several thoughts raced through my head: *What if I mess up? What if my feet smell? Should I wash them ahead of time?*

When the foot-washing began, my fears and questions subsided. We sat in a circle and passed around a large bowl, singing hymns

and kneeling on the floor to wash and dry each other's feet. When it was my turn, the elderly woman next to me moved slowly from her seat to the tile floor. She wrapped the large white towel around her waist and leaned forward to lift my feet into the tin basin. Tears streamed down my face as I watched her wrinkled hands cup water to cleanse my feet, which suddenly looked dirtier and heavier than before. For a moment I felt guilty, sinful even for letting this elder kneel before me. But in that moment, the gospel made more sense to me than it ever had. This is the good news, even though it doesn't make any sense.

As I continued to attend this church, Christian theology and practice became illuminated in new and exciting ways. I remember one Easter morning when I experienced the fullness of forgiveness and hope in the resurrection for the first time. I'll never forget that day.

These spiritual revelations were not planned or crafted by church committees. They probably wouldn't have meant much to me if that had been so, but they were made possible because of strong relationships and communal support. I began attending this church because a woman offered to pick me up on campus and drive me to worship on Sunday mornings. And I continued to attend because other members welcomed me into the community.

Churches can focus on making their services accessible and welcoming to young adults by showing sincere interest in our lives and faith journeys. I don't need faster music or pop culture references to feel connected. In fact, congregations waste a lot of time trying to figure out how to make Christianity "meaningful" for younger folks. This is ultimately something we each need to figure out on our own. All I really want is to feel safe and cared for in my church community. Then I'll engage in the more difficult work of finding lasting meaning in Christian faith and practice.

Here is my hope and prayer: Help young adults like me to stay rooted; give us space to find meaning; listen to our stories. Offer us a supportive, nourishing environment and we—along with the church—will thrive. ■

Anne Marie Roderick is former editorial assistant and Joshua Witchger is former online editorial assistant at Sojourners.





Mexican poet Javier Sicilia, the leader of the Mexican anti-drug-war group Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, holds a photo of his murdered son during a 50-cross procession in Los Angeles to remember the victims of violence.

BY MARGARET REGAN

NONVIOLENCE AND THE DRUG WAR

The U.S. and Mexican governments have tried to battle drug violence with more violence. It hasn't worked. Gandhian groups in Mexico offer another way.

ON A BLAZING August day last summer, Rosa Pérez Triana faced a crowd of several hundred people in downtown Tucson and held up a color photo of a pretty young woman.

"This is my daughter, Coral," Pérez said in Spanish, her voice breaking. "A year ago she went missing. There are thousands of people in Mexico like me who don't know what happened to their loved ones."

A middle-aged woman from the violent state of Nuevo León in northern Mexico, Pérez had come to the United States with the Caravan for Peace with Justice and Dignity to tell her North American neighbors what had happened to her daughter—and to an estimated 80,000 other Mexicans who have been killed or disappeared during the country's six-year-old war on drugs.

Her daughter's story is typical. Guadalupe Coral Pérez Triana vanished on July 24, 2011, somewhere on the road between Reynosa, Tamaulipas, and Monterrey, Nuevo León. Five other young women were traveling with her. All are missing and presumed dead.

"The main purpose of the caravan is to show a human face," explained Laura Carlsen, director of the Center for International Policy's Americas Program in Mexico, who joined the caravan on its last leg through the East Coast. "These are people whose family members were victims." Such are the human costs of the war

on drugs that the U.S. government supports with arms and money.

According to the U.S. State Department, the U.S. government has contributed \$1.9 billion through the Mérida Initiative to help Mexico wage the drug war. Not only do Americans provide the market for the drugs sold by the drug cartels, they also supply the weapons that have taken the lives of thousands.

Led by Mexican poet Javier Sicilia, the catalyst for Mexico's Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, the caravan rolled across the U.S. in August and September. Some 100 volunteers traveled in two buses, crossing the border at Tijuana and visiting 26 cities before ending up in Washington, D.C., where they begged U.S. congressional representatives to stop funding the drug war.

Along the way, Pérez and some 20 other people grieving the deaths of their loved ones stood up to speak, in city after city, armed with the photos of lost sons, husbands, daughters, sisters, and brothers. One of the caravanners, María Herrera Magdaleno of Michoacán, had suffered an unimaginable loss: Her poster bore the photos of her four missing sons.

"Think of the weapons going to Mexico to the hands of criminals; assault weapons designed for extermination, not healing," Sicilia said in Tucson during the U.S. leg in 2012. "Arms sold in Arizona, New Mexico,

and Texas are sold to people who ... use them to exterminate, kidnap, and destroy human life and democracy. The U.S. and Mexico must not allow this." Many of the weapons that the drug cartels use are smuggled illegally across the U.S. southwest border.

In an open letter to the people of the U.S. released in April 2012, Sicilia urged the two nations to put an end to gun trafficking, "debate alternatives to drug prohibition ... combat money laundering," and protect the migrants who are endangered.

The policy of fighting violence with violence is madness.

Sicilia himself is among the suffering. His son Juan Francisco, a 24-year-old student, was found gagged and strangled in a car outside Cuernavaca, south of Mexico City, in March 2011. The murder was blamed on drug-gang members. Sicilia's very public grief—he vowed never again to write a line of poetry while violent death stalked his homeland—helped galvanize a popular peace movement against the murderous drug war.

In 2011, he led two caravans through Mexico, decrying as madness the Mexican and U.S. policy of fighting violence with violence.

The drug war ignited in Mexico in 2006, when then-President Felipe Calderón called up thousands of troops to battle the cartels. (President Enrique Peña Nieto was inaugurated Dec. 1, 2012.) In the ensuing chaos, thousands of innocents have perished—shot in the crossfire, killed in cases of mistaken identity, or deliberately murdered to terrorize the population into compliance with the *narcotraficantes'* demands.

In addition to the 60,000 dead, "at least 20,000 have disappeared," Carlsen said. To make human beings vanish, organized criminal networks—such as the Zetas drug cartel—"dump bodies into a pit and drop acid on them" and cover them up. "Other times they leave bodies in full view, decapitated, to send a message."

The Mexican military and police have also been implicated in the deaths. Few of the slayings are even investigated, let alone solved, Carlsen said, and some corrupt "state actors ... are complicit in the deaths." The Zetas themselves metamorphosed from a crack law-enforcement unit into one of the

most bloodthirsty of the cartels.

The government's response to a brutal massacre in the dangerous border city of Ciudad Juárez in January 2010 was crucial in turning opinion against Calderón's tactic of indiscriminate violence. When 16 young people, most of them students, were slaughtered by two truckloads of armed men, Calderón dismissed the victims as criminals. Luz María Davila, the mother of two of the dead teens, confronted the president when he visited the stricken city. In a video that

went viral, Davila insisted her sons were innocent and called Calderón's accusations lies.

"This was one of the first times people were accusing the government" of bearing some responsibility for the deaths, Carlsen explained. "Juárez was one of the major places where the armed forces carried out the war on drugs. It clearly backfired and generated violence."

DESPITE THE HORROR of the slaughters, the movement is responding with nonviolence. Some of the participants act out of their Christian faith. At the Tucson rally, a Catholic priest compared the sufferings of the families to those of Jesus and cast their search for justice in religious terms.

"Jesus also suffered violence," he said. "We are invoking Christ resurrected to end the violence in our homes, communities, and nations. Search for justice; end the violence."

The movement's methods—deploying large numbers of people peacefully bearing witness—hark back to earlier campaigns of nonviolent resistance. Sicilia's own writings reflect a Christian mysticism, and when he spoke at the caravan rally in Washington, D.C., in September, he invoked Martin Luther King Jr. as an inspiration. And like King, he is influenced by his studies of Gandhi. He told Tom Hayden in *The Nation*, "I come from Gandhism."

The movement as a whole is inspired by Gandhian principles, Carlsen said, and its members offer "alternatives to violence to create another path."

The peace movement has taken multiple new forms throughout Mexico, with groups

creatively using social media and art projects to get the message out. EmergenciaMX.org is one of many sites that post online video testimonials of family members about the murders of their loved ones. In Ecatepec, a poor suburb of Mexico City, giant photographs of crime victims were attached to modest houses on the hills, the better to be seen by everyone in town.

In Monterrey—the northern city young Coral Pérez was trying to reach when she vanished—Mesa de Paz (Peace Table) takes a different approach. A consortium of 12 different groups, Mesa de Paz employs direct action, putting Gandhi's teachings into practice to counteract the violence that has gripped the region in the last three years.

Long one of the most prosperous and peaceful cities in Mexico, Monterrey took a violent turn in 2010, when the Zetas began battling the Gulf cartel for dominance in the city. From 2011 until fall 2012, there were more than 1,600 murders. A massacre in May 2012 left the bodies of 49 victims outside the city, mutilated and decapitated. And the violence is only getting worse, said Fernando Ferrara Rivero of Mesa de Paz.

"You go downtown, 8:30 or 9 at night, you can hear the machine guns. I have seen people run [away] with guys trying to shoot them," he said. "It's really a war here."

But Ferrara and his colleagues see the U.S.-backed government strategy of counteracting violence with violence as a failure. "We don't think punitive law is going to solve the problem."

Instead, Mesa de Paz tries to attack the root causes of crime and violence by improving the lives of those directly around them. Following the principle of *Swadeshi*, or self-sufficiency—"an instrument Gandhi used in the nonviolent struggle" against British rule in India—"we target Monterrey alone." The principle, Ferrara explained, is that "the closest to me is myself—what you can change. You—America—can't come to Mexico and save us. We have to save ourselves."

Nelson Mandela, King, and Gandhi all followed these precepts, he said. "I'm very Gandhian. I studied in India at the Institute of Gandhian Studies, Wardha."

The activities of Mesa de Paz's member NGOs in distressed parts of the city in some ways resemble old-fashioned settlement work.



Pictures of victims of violence are hung on the facades and walls of houses in the neighborhood of Cerro Gordo in Ecatepec, outside Mexico City. The photographs were placed by the Murrieta Foundation during an exhibition called "Giving face to the victims in Ecatepec."

Members fan out, visiting jails, schools, and families of the sick; they do art with kids in rough neighborhoods; they work with alcoholics and ex-prisoners in halfway houses.

A former gang leader has "developed a program to make the gangs into leaders," Ferrara stated. "He has 15 people working with 80 to 90 gangs." His idea is to leave in place the social networks that give the kids a sense of belonging, while turning them away from crime and toward social good. "He's not destroying gangs so much as making them leaders, positive leaders." However, he cannot naively ignore the presence of the cartels. "The cartels are there," Ferrara said. "He has to struggle with that" and asks for permission to work in neighborhoods they control. (For the safety of the groups and their members, Ferrara declines to give names.)

ANOTHER ORGANIZATION works with "cops who have gone bad," Ferrara said. The leader is a woman "with the biggest heart." In her day job, she's a lawyer who negotiates between cartels and police, and in her

activist work, she tries to persuade corrupt police to reform.

She sweetens her message by organizing festivals for the cops' kids. On any given Saturday, she might have 200 children, Ferrara said, leading them in fun activities and teaching them good values. A male colleague in her group, a one-time criminal, "tells the police they can change." The work is dangerous, Ferrara said. "I'm surprised he hasn't been killed. I know some of the people (in Mesa de Paz) will be martyrs. I'm sure of it."

Ferrara fears for his own safety sometimes in his work with gangs and a halfway house, he said, "but our goal should be worth putting ourselves in danger." It's important to reach out to boys who feel alienated from society, he explained, because without intervention, they're likely to get involved in gangs—and go down the path to crime and violence.

"You see the boys excluded. You see hopelessness, powerlessness, and anomie. We are waiting for them to commit a crime to put

them in jail. It's a stupid approach." Likewise, he added, it's foolish for the government to kill *narcotraficantes* in hopes of eliminating the cartels—or in hopes of preventing more deaths. Violence begets violence, he said, and murders lead to more murders.

Ferrara cited an incident last October in which Mexican marines killed Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, the much-sought-after leader of the Zetas. (The case became notorious when Lazcano's followers stole his body back from government custody.)

"It's useless to kill him: he's only going to be replaced," Ferrara said. "Another guy is going to be the boss. It's not going to stop. I think moral and conscience development are the only things that can end the violence." ■

Margaret Regan, a longtime journalist in Tucson, Ariz., is the author of *The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona Borderlands*, named *Southwest Book of the Year* in 2010. Regan has won many journalism awards for her border reporting and arts criticism.



Suraj Sharma plays Pi.

By Sandi Villarreal

TIGERS BY THE **TALE**

For *Life of Pi* screenwriter David Magee, stories help light the way through chaos and despair.

IT'S A STORY that promises to make you believe in God.

A boy, shipwrecked on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger, repeatedly cheats death and eventually discovers his own self. It's a typical coming-of-age tale, really—except for the whole tiger part.

Life of Pi centers on Pi Patel, the son of a zookeeper, who grows up grasping to understand God. His open heart and willingness to learn lead him from Hinduism to Christianity to Islam. While stranded at sea along with a few escaped zoo animals as company, he continues to explore the meaning of God as he's thrust into dramatic—and at times inconceivable—situations.

Anyone who has read Yann Martel's best-selling book can understand how near



in the margins of a little notebook that he had with a pencil in the tiniest lettering he could, and he tried to keep track of his thoughts and his observations in order to keep himself from going insane,” Magee said.

Magee did the same thing in the film and used Pi’s journal entries, jotted in the margins of his survival manual, to delve into the character’s inner dialogue. Through the written word and the slow dissolving of his one pencil, the days and nights pass as Pi becomes ever more weary.

But the solitude of his journey is part of its beauty. Because the viewer is seeing things

Anyone who has read *Life of Pi* can understand how near impossible it seems to adapt the larger-than-life story into a film.

through the mind of this creative and open young boy, magnificent pictures emerge. The sky becomes an impossible confluence of colors. The ocean glows green with sea life beneath the makeshift raft Pi builds to stay a safe distance from the tiger in the boat. And a life-threatening, carnivorous tiger becomes Pi’s salvation.

As is often the case in real life, the film pivots on the protagonist reaching his breaking point. When Pi has nothing left to give, almost no strength, and absolutely no understanding of why these horrible things have happened to him, he gives everything over to God.

“The zoo is gone, his family is gone ... the only thing he has left confronting him is a voracious tiger who is ready to kill him the moment he lets his guard down,” Magee said. “Of course he reaches a point on his journey when he says, essentially, ‘God, why hast thou forsaken me?’”

But Pi then realizes that Richard Parker is the one thing that keeps him sane. The constant threat of death is what ultimately saves his life.

In that desperate nadir of anger and questioning, Pi also reaches another biblically reminiscent juncture—the “your will be done” moment. Pi remains faithful to this

Continued on Page 41

impossible it seems to adapt the larger-than-life story into a film—none more so than the person who did just that, screenwriter David Magee. The largest chunk of Pi’s journey is a solitary one, save the aforementioned Bengal tiger (named Richard Parker).

In an interview with *Sojourners*, Magee said he wrote the scenes without any lines for Pi at all, only inserting them where necessary after the fact.

“We didn’t want to have some strange conversations with the tiger that he would never have,” Magee said.

To work out other ways to move along the story, the filmmakers met with Steven Callahan, an actual survivor of a shipwreck who spent 76 days at sea.

“While he was on his journey, [he] wrote

New & Noteworthy

FRESH VINTAGE

Cody ChesnuTT’s *Landing on a Hundred* is a classic soul album, from the infectious grooves and vocals to recurrent themes of personal and social redemption (comparisons include Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield). Vibration Vineyard



RECLAIMED VOICES

A team of actors, playwrights, and activists help Ugandan teens, many of them survivors of abduction by the Lord’s Resistance Army, courageously share their stories with their community—and, through the documentary *After Kony: Staging Hope*, with the world. First Run Feature



EXILE AND WELCOME

In *Kind of Kin*, by Rilla Askew, a rural Oklahoma family finds itself torn from within and without when its patriarch is arrested for harboring undocumented immigrants in his barn. Sometimes heart-rending, sometimes laugh-out-loud funny, this novel deftly explores issues of faith, family, immigration, and economic hardship in the heartland. Ecco

DEFIANT PRAYER

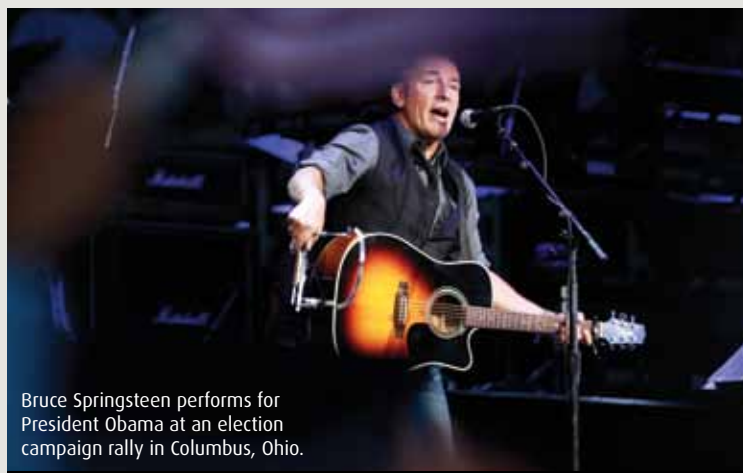
The Last Segregated Hour: The Memphis Kneel-ins and the Campaign for Southern Church Desegregation, by Stephen R. Haynes, tells an inspiring, lesser-known story of the civil rights era: the 1964-65 campaign by groups of white and black students to challenge segregation in local churches. Oxford



People Get Ready

IT WAS THE first week of November 2012, and Bruce Springsteen was busy helping nail down a few swing states for President Obama. In the process, he expressed more enthusiasm than I could ever muster for the man who put Tim “The Fox” Geithner in charge of our financial hen house. But political quibbles aside, I remain convinced that what Springsteen actually does for a living is more important to the life of our country than the work of any living politician, and I saw living proof that very same week.

On the Saturday night before Election Day, Springsteen and his E Street Band dropped into Louisville, Ky. Of course, my wife, Polly, and I had to go, and we had to take our 12-year-old son, Joseph, who has become the fourth Springsteen-obsessed member of our family. It was my fifth time to see the show, and ever since I’ve been thinking of



Bruce Springsteen performs for President Obama at an election campaign rally in Columbus, Ohio.

Jason Reed/Reuters

represents the sacred American musical tradition that has grown from the work songs, ring shouts, and spirituals of the slaves.

Over time, that tradition has mingled with the folk and country of Southern poor whites and cross-pollinated with other sounds that came up from Mexico and the Caribbean and over from Europe. Today, most of this tradition is onstage at an E Street Band show. The core rock band is now joined by horns and a choir. Those rock and soul staples are occasion-

ally supplemented by accordion, Stevie Van Zandt’s Italian mandolin, and an extra percussionist who sometimes breaks out an Irish marching drum.

And speaking of rock and soul staples, “lovemaking [and] booty-shaking,” as Springsteen puts it, are still high on the E Street Band’s agenda, but the band’s sense of purpose has also broadened and deepened with time. In the early years, the band’s signature song was “Born to Run,” a young man’s dream of love and freedom. In the middle period, “Born in the U.S.A.” put the band firmly on the side of those exploited, abused, and ignored by

America’s economic powers-that-be. In 1999, after most of a decade apart, Springsteen reunited with his band, and the signature song for the E Street Band in this century is “Land of Hope and Dreams.” That song, which incorporates snatches of Curtis Mayfield’s pop-gospel classic “People Get Ready,” does the trick that Martin Luther King Jr.’s best speeches did, of conflating the gospel promise—here symbolized by the train that carries “saints and sinners ... losers and winners”—with the American dream.

The “hope and dreams” in Springsteen’s song are those of the immigrant, the refugee, and the runaway slave for a place where all are welcomed and none are left behind. And for three hours on a Saturday night, I came to believe that America could be that land again. Three days later, my fellow citizens went to the polls and rejected plutocracy. So maybe I can still hope, against all hope, that at least my children may one day live in a country that is worthy of its E Street Band. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

The “hope and dreams” in Springsteen’s song are those of the immigrant, the refugee, and the runaway slave.

the poem in which Allen Ginsberg asked America, “When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?” Paraphrasing Ginsberg, I ask today, “America, when will you be worthy of your E Street Band?”

To me, going to see the E Street Band has become something like going to see a natural wonder, like Yellowstone or Mammoth Cave or, more to the point, the California redwood forests: Like the redwoods, it’s growing older. The bark gets rougher by the decade, and some branches break off and fall to the earth. But Springsteen’s great tree of American music is still growing in stature and substance. The band has become a cultural institution that spans races, genders, and generations and fittingly



Continued from Page 39

God he's constructed from various world religions and fully accepts the will of the divine in the middle of his suffering.

Magee said there are clear parallels in Pi's story to those in the Bible.

"There's the obvious beginning of the journey, when he considers himself on 'Pi's ark,' the only one who escapes, and takes the animals with him on this journey ... gradually it turns into Job's story," Magee said.

But both the book and the film pull themes from across the religious spectrum. As a boy, Pi is influenced by the world around him, which leads him to various interpretations of God. Instead of seeing those ideas as conflicting beliefs, Pi embraces them all.

It's in the Hindu faith of his mother that Pi says he first meets God. But then he



A life-threatening, carnivorous tiger becomes Pi's salvation.

encounters Christianity and, while wary at first, meets God a second time in the incarnation of Christ revealed to him through an Orthodox priest. Then he learns about Islam, stretching his nonreligious father's patience ever more when he tells him, "I would like to be baptized and I would like a prayer rug."

"There's even a nod to atheism in here. Atheists have a worldview, a point of view; they rely on a story, a narrative to get them through," Magee said.

It's the undercurrent of religion and faith within each story that Magee said the film tries to expose. It doesn't preach, and it doesn't show preference. It just illustrates that each life is a narrative.

"We don't want to say that you should believe in all things and nothing all at once. All of these narratives, all of these stories that we rely on are groping for answers to the same



TOP 10 OF 2012

THE BEST experiences I had at the cinema last year were nostalgic—re-releases of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and *Lawrence of Arabia* were uncanny reflections on the cost of war to soldiers and some roots of contemporary Middle East strife. Here's my list of the best films released in 2012:

10. A tie: *The Pirates! Band of Misfits*, a gloriously rich, smart comedy for all ages, full of life and self-deprecating humor, and ***Life of Pi***, which envelopes its audience with visual wonders and spiritual questions.

9. Wes Anderson's delightful treatment of childhood first love amid dysfunctional adults, and a film not afraid of the shadow side of growing up, ***Moonrise Kingdom***.

8. *The Cabin in the Woods*, a gruesome horror comedy that not only enacts and portrays, but understands the lie of redemptive violence.

7. The sprawling, operatic imagining of love-transcending-all that is ***Cloud Atlas***, which made me feel the way *Star Wars* might—if it were written for adults.

6. *The Dark Knight Rises*, the conclusion to a truly epic film series that imagined heroism as self-giving rather than merely slaughtering every bad guy in sight.

5. A disturbing, unpleasant, and utterly compelling vision of religious searching and abuse, relational longing and exploitation, holistic change and psychic torture, ***The Master***.

4. *Looper*, the most fully realized and coherent future sci-fi world since *Blade*

Runner, and over-the-top entertainment invoking both *The Wizard of Oz* and just war theory.

3. For sheer enjoyability, life-affirming magic, political questioning, and prophetic insights, look no further than the work of mad genius called ***Holy Motors***, in which a man engages with what it is to be human, critiques our culture's addiction to relating through screens and bytes, and wonders aloud about violence as a way of life.

2. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the most truthful high school film I've seen, with totally believable performances, honest facing of adolescent pain, and the best way of turning an old, clichéd piece of music back into something totally fresh.

1. For me the freshest film of 2012 is ***Seven Psychopaths***, a self-referencing, Tarantino-trouncing, imagination-expanding story about storytelling itself. *Seven Psychopaths* manages to reach back into imperial history and imagine a credible alternative to fight-or-flight myths that is both inspirational and full of moral strength. It understands the power of telling stories, and how, this year and next, it is storytellers who will command the attention, fund the public imagination, and change the world for the better or worse. ■

Gareth Higgins is a Sojourners contributing editor and executive director of the Wild Goose Festival. Originally from Northern Ireland, he lives in Asheville, North Carolina.

question. And there are more in common in these stories than you might at first realize on the surface,” Magee said. “They’re all trying to put some sort of order on the chaos and the despair that we confront in our lives, and if you listen to those stories, you can hear the common theme along the journey.”

So, is *Pi*’s a story that will make you believe in God? You’ll have to see for yourself (in 3-D).

But there’s a larger piece here. Are you looking for a story to make you believe in God? Maybe you should look at your own. Each of us has a story to tell.

It’s in the journey—with its little miracles and little tragedies, the faces of the people who join our stories along the way, fleeting bits of joy, moments of utter despair that bring us to our knees, and realizations of love—where we glimpse God. And that’s where we believe. ■

Sandi Villarreal is web editor at *Sojourners*. You can follow her on Twitter @Sandi.

Reviewed by Julie Polter

CROSSING THE BELIEF DIVIDE

ReFocus: Living a Life that Reflects God’s Heart, by Jim Daly. Zondervan.
Faithiest: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious, by Chris Stedman. Beacon.

IT WAS AS if the poison of the rancorous 2012 campaign had seeped into our social groundwater, tainting family gatherings, Facebook feeds, church coffee hours, and workplace lunch rooms. In my lowest moments I pictured an election-result map rendered with myriad fractures, like windshield glass—a nation of particles and fragments, held together, barely, by begrudging surface tension.

How do those of good will find productive and respectful ways to talk about important civic and moral issues when a significant number of people view their fellow citizens as enemies?

Two recent books, by radically different authors, explore how to stay committed to

your principles while reaching out and even finding common cause with those who live and believe differently.

ReFocus: Living a Life that Reflects God’s Heart, is by Jim Daly, president since 2005 of Focus on the Family. *Faithiest: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious* is by Chris Stedman, the assistant Humanist chaplain at Harvard University and an activist in atheist-interfaith engagement. Daly leads a conservative evangelical institution that has been a major player on the Right in the culture wars of the past three decades (including around what Focus would term the “homosexual lifestyle”). Stedman is a young gay atheist who was once attacked by thugs who shouted Bible verses as they tried to shove him and a friend in front of an oncoming train. And yet both men argue, from both pragmatic and ethical grounds, for actively and respectfully engaging those who hold different beliefs.

The difference between Daly and his predecessor, Focus founder and culture gladiator James Dobson, is hinted at in this chapter title: “We’re Not Entitled to Run the World.” As Daly writes early on in *ReFocus*: “you should know that this isn’t a book about what’s going badly in the culture, but rather one about how Christians should respond to it. ... Are we more concerned with shaping the debate than we are with shaping and refining our own attitudes toward the world?” Daly argues that conservative evangelicals are called first to love, compassion, and humility.

Focus has not, of course, radically shifted its positions on things like marriage equality or abortion. Daly believes that both “God’s design” and “social science research ... affirms the wisdom of the traditional one-man/one-woman marriage.” But, noting the dramatic increase in societal acceptance of same-sex marriage, he asks, “If our current methods are failing to stem the tide of public acceptance, shouldn’t we consider the possibility that the Lord is calling us to engage in a different way?” Likewise, Focus



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remains committed to overturning *Roe vs. Wade*, but Daly also argues for a two-track approach, maintaining the legal battle while reaching out to those on the pro-choice side to seek ways to reduce the abortion rate, such as promoting adoption.

Some Focus supporters have sharply criticized Daly for even these fairly modest steps away from “warrior mode,” or others, such as signing on to the “Evangelical Statement of Principles for Immigration Reform” last summer. Liberal critics might chalk up some of his shifts in tone to strategic pragmatism in the face of changing demographics. But with its emphasis on scripture and personal humility, *ReFocus* communicates, from within the boundaries of a conservative Christian worldview, the sincere desire of a true believer to challenge himself and others to follow “a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

CHRIS STEDMAN’S book, *Faithleist*, a spiritual autobiography with a nontheistic ending, traces Stedman’s journey from his evangelical conversion as an adolescent, then into Lutheranism when conservative teachings and his sexual orientation became irreconcilable. He entered Augsburg College expecting it “to be a time of spiritual growth that would set my call to ministry.” Instead, gradually, Stedman discovered that he simply didn’t believe in God anymore; he describes himself as “insufferable” for a time in his derision toward others’ beliefs.

But as his commitment to atheism deepened, so did his interest in understanding religious people, their stories, and their beliefs. He realized his attitude had been “defined by caricature and critique instead of humility, honesty, and open-mindedness.” Stedman decided to concretely “bridge the vast divide between religious communities and the nonreligious.” In an unusual move for an atheist, he entered seminary and also began working with Interfaith Youth Core.

Some atheists’ aggressive hostility toward religion frustrates Stedman (although he notes that as a small minority in the U.S., atheists also receive some hostility). For Stedman, secular humanism intrinsically involves care for people and service to society—goals that

are incompatible with bigotry of any kind. And so his book is a hand of friendship offered to people of faith and no faith. Not just to make nice, but to make ways for people with very different motivations to serve others and build justice together.

The message of combining passionate, principled belief with humility, love, and

Reviewed by Will O’Brien

SLEEPER AWAKE!

Unto Us the Sun, by Aimee Wilson. Self-released.

IN THE TITLE song of Aimee Wilson’s new album, *Unto Us the Sun*, the music begins soft and gentle, like a slight shaft of light breaking over the morning horizon. Gradually the song intensifies, both instrumentally and vocally, until it reaches an almost ecstatic

crescendo—a musical embodiment of the process she lyrically portrays of the subtleties of nature opening up its unspeakable beauty, a grand chorus of creation praising its Creator. It is also hardly incidental that the song evokes biblical language of resurrection, while both the title and images such as “tender as the shoot” subtly hint at the presence of Christ—not a heavy-handed doctrinal Christ, but the saving incarnation of a loving God.

Wilson is part of a remarkable network of young, spiritually rooted musicians (such as the Psalters) who are fashioning a very new and dynamic musical language of radical faith—a faith that is searching, exploring the edges of experience, probing human hurts and joys as well as divine mysteries and manifestations. Wilson’s personal journey has taken her from the hills of her native Tennessee to inner-city Philadelphia. Her songs cover a range of moods, many reflecting her mystical apprehension of God’s presence in creation. Other songs, drawing on her experience working with women who have struggled with homelessness and mental illness, convey the power of grace amid human brokenness.

Her music, which she has called “a dialogue with God,” is deeply personal yet evokes universal and ancient chords. In crafting her art, she draws upon a variety of traditions,

respect toward others is not new. But in this contentious age, for two people as far apart on the religious and political spectrum as Daly and Stedman to choose to deliver it is notable, and perhaps a sign of hope. ■

Julie Polter is an associate editor of Sojourners.



Singer
Aimee
Wilson

from American Sacred Harp choral music to Hindu devotional chants to Middle Eastern rhythms. The album features remarkable layering of instrumental textures, including the Indian sitar, the Chinese *erhu*, the harp, and the hurdy gurdy. The songs move

from gentle solo guitar lines to elaborate and intricate percussion. And her amazing voice, tremulous yet strong, stamps an unmistakable character on all the pieces—one that is passionate, searching, and authentic.

In the song “Suri” (a Persian word for “red rock”) Wilson makes her most remarkable statement of the gospel: “Up from Jesse’s shoot stands a root that breaks the ground / we lay until we taste the wine that bled, / and you broke the bread into our depths: Yeshua, ... Touch and taste the wounds of grace that fill our cups and call us to say: ... Yeshua.”

But while we live with the “wounds of grace,” that gospel is also embedded in the ineffable rapture of the world around us, a rapture to which we must be attentive. In the closing number, “The Wheel,” Wilson returns again to the image of a sunrise, singing this invocation: “Hear the call of the rising sun / Ablaze in all that breathes for more / And in the winds I hear you singing / Along the edge of a new beginning / Awake my soul.” The song and the album then conclude with a gorgeous Sacred Harp choir chanting, “Awake my soul.”

This is indeed music to awaken our souls. ■

Will O’Brien is coordinator of The Alternative Seminary (www.alternativeseminary.net) in Philadelphia. Aimee Wilson’s music is at aimee.thefactory.com.

Reviewed by Tobias Winright

GETTING TO GREEN

Sacred Acts: How Churches Are Working to Protect Earth's Climate, edited by Mallory McDuff. New Society.

IN THE FOREWORD to *Sacred Acts: How Churches Are Working to Protect Earth's Climate*, prolific scholar-activist Bill McKibben recalls a time not long ago when many people of faith regarded environmentalism suspiciously—conservatives saw it as a cover for possible paganism, while liberals considered it less of a priority than problems such as war and poverty. Now, however, theologians and religious leaders discuss the environment almost as much as ecologists and Nobel prize-winning scientists do. As this book shows, moreover, the environmental movement now includes religious organizations such as Earth Ministry, Interfaith Power & Light, and GreenFaith, which are working at the grassroots level in congregations and communities.

Edited by Mallory McDuff, a lay Episcopalian who teaches environmental education at Warren Wilson College near Asheville, N.C., *Sacred Acts* boldly focuses on climate change. McDuff believes that momentum is building among Christian communities worldwide as they call for just climate solutions—much like a modern Pentecost moment. The book addresses both skeptics and those who know climate change is real but feel overwhelmed by the problem's magnitude and despair of finding and implementing solutions.

The contributors to *Sacred Acts* include clergy, teachers, activists, directors of nonprofit organizations, and a farmer. Its 12 chapters are divided into four sections on the themes and strategies of stewardship,

spirituality, advocacy, and justice.

Each contributor concentrates on “opportunities for empowering action”—just earthkeeping practices, I would call them. Instead of offering analysis of the theological *whys*, the chapters deal with the practical *hows* of the “need to share and replicate the range of actions that congregations can take to convert communities to a low-carbon future.” Concrete examples, anecdotes, illustrations, diagrams, and graphs abound to equip individuals and local congregations to put environmental theology into practice.

For example, writer and farmer Ragan Sutterfield proposes a catechesis to encourage appreciation of fresh rather than processed, canned, and packaged fruits and vegetables. To illustrate, he highlights Cedar Ridge Community Church near Washington, D.C., where members took up farming to grow and provide meals for the poor and needy—which revived and promoted neighborliness and harvesting celebrations in the community.

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The Common Ground Church Community with its Goodness Grows mission in North Lima, Ohio, builds community gardens, teaches job skills to youth, and operates agricultural businesses such as a subscription-based vegetable program.

McDuff explores more sustainable burial practices that conserve energy and minimize waste, while also involving family and friends, who do things like shoveling dirt into the grave. She introduces the Trappist monks of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Ga., who operate a green cemetery. Burying the dead is truly a corporal work of mercy there, with the option of pine caskets and avoidance of toxic embalming chemicals.

Episcopal Rev. Brian Cole, sub-dean of the Cathedral of All Souls in Asheville, N.C., suggests ways that clergy can “allow the natural world to come ‘inside,’ to figure prominently in prayers and litanies and hymns and sermons”; LeeAnne Beres and Jessie Dye highlight Earth Ministry, a national leader in training people of faith in advocacy skills and helping them to be heard in public policy decision-making; Michele McGeoy’s chapter deals with training green-collar workers, as exemplified by Solar Richmond, a grassroots organization in Richmond, Calif., that trains underemployed and unemployed people to work in the solar industry. Meanwhile St. John’s Episcopal Church in Oakland, Calif., reduced its carbon footprint while creating a full-time job for a Solar Richmond graduate.

Sacred Acts is ideal for adult education classes in parishes and congregations seeking renewed inspiration and practical insights into caring for the environment. The chapters included in each of the book’s four sections sometimes seem arbitrary; for instance, the chapters by Sutterfield and Norman Wirzba, which are in different sections, could just as easily have been placed together. Otherwise, McDuff and the contributors have done us a tremendous service that I hope many will put to good use. ■

Tobias Winright is associate professor of theological ethics at Saint Louis University and editor of *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*.

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Sandi Villarreal

Why are these people smiling?

Maybe they were enjoying the mild temperatures of autumn in Washington, D.C., before winter set in. Or maybe it's because they had managed to squeeze onto the tiny back porch at their house.

But probably it's because they are Sojourners Interns—members of the 2012-13 class—also lovingly known as Cycle 29. The Sojourners internship program is a place of growth and challenge for people who are serious about their vocational calling. Interns live together in community, work in our various departments, and learn important skills to make an impact for justice and peace in the world. Sojourners interns energize our work in messaging, publishing, and mobilizing. We think they're terrific, and we hope you'll consider becoming one.

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Above, Sojourners 2012-13 interns, top row, from left: Krystal Brewer, Resources & Circulation; Martin Witchger, Mobilizing; Brandon Hook, Online; second row: Jessica Turner, Communications; Janelle Tupper, Campaigns; Dawn Araujo, Editorial; bottom row: Jenny Smith, Executive; Kelly Dunlap, Advertising; Brandon Baird, Individual Giving.

Why We (Still) Can't Wait

DURING THE unseasonably warm autumn of 1951, 22-year-old Martin King Jr. began his doctoral work in systematic theology at Boston University. Wearing his good suit in a stifling classroom, he was first introduced to the work of philosopher and ethicist Josiah Royce. King read Royce's well-regarded 1913 book *The Problem of Christianity* and wrestled with Royce's metaphysical values of loyalty, communitarian ideals, and the role of the individual within a group.

But don't let the high academic or philosophical language fool you. Royce was interested in only one thing: Love. It was the hidden heart of all his endeavors. And King began to study—and embrace—Royce's most important philosophical concept: the Beloved Community.

Though Royce had first written about the Beloved Community



The 1965 Selma march offered a model of the Beloved Community.

to be authentic, King knew, it must not only impel us to action but also carry our suffering. Would it stand up in situations like Cicero or Montgomery or Birmingham?

"A community," according to Royce, "is constituted by the fact that each of its members accepts as part of his or her own individual

life the self-same past events." The Beloved Community not only says but intuitively

feels that what happens to one of us, happens to all of us.

THIS SPRING MARKS the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

It was written in response to white ministers who urged civil rights leaders to follow the law and push for social change through the court system. They deplored the rising social violence in Alabama in 1963 and sought peace by appealing to the cool reason of the law. The demonstrations in Birmingham were, they said, "unwise and untimely."

King's epistle in response verges on sacred text: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage

in a direct action campaign that was 'well timed' in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.'"

The incarnation of this press for freedom as a spiritually fueled social movement was understood by King to be the Beloved Community. It was not a utopian ideal and not Isaiah's vision of a peaceable kingdom, but instead a rough-and-tumble, realistic, achievable goal that could be attained through a critical mass of people who were committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.

In our own era, we are also called to the Beloved Community and hear it in the context of our own times. "Let this life be your art," wrote Josiah Royce, "and also the art of all your fellow members. Let your community be as a chorus," he wrote, and not "as a company who forgets themselves in a common trance." ■

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Who Killed Donte Manning?* (available at store.sojournal.net), is a Catholic peace activist and a Sojourners associate editor.



The Beloved Community is not a utopian ideal.

nearly 40 years earlier, King heard it in the context of his own time and place. He heard it in the context of the insidious Jim Crow laws of the South. In 1951 he also heard it in the context of the bitter race realities of the North. The July before King started classes at Harvard, a race riot had erupted in Cicero, Illinois, outside Chicago. A mob of whites attacked an apartment building that housed one black family, that of Harvey Clark Jr., a WW II veteran and bus driver who had moved into the all-white neighborhood.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, "In two nights of rioting, some 3,000 persons battled police and National Guardsmen. Twenty-three civilians, police, and Guardsmen were injured and 119 persons arrested." Buildings were burned. Mr. Clark and his family moved away.

If the Beloved Community was

Risking Depth and Passion

"EVEN IF I OWNED Picasso's 'Guernica,' I could not hang it on a wall in my house, and although I own a recording of the Solti Chicago Symphony performance of Stravinsky's 'Rite of Spring,' I play it only rarely. One cannot live every day on the boundary of human existence in the world, and yet it is to this boundary that one is constantly brought by the parables of Jesus." So wrote a great New Testament scholar, Norman Perrin, in his book *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*. I often think about his frankness as I prepare for the transition between Epiphany and Lent. We must soften and make bearable the intensity of the scriptural story to face it every week in church. We can't dive to the depths every single week, and we are right to keep our child-friendliness going.

But we need to risk depth and passion, or run the danger of making the gospel seem boring and predictable. Our churchly betrayal of God lies in our willingness to make the Word seem banal. So perhaps the thing we need to give up for Lent is our avoidance of depth. The scriptures this month will speak to us of faith as the experience of being stressed almost to a breaking point. They will plumb the depths of divine frustration and disappointment. We must clear a space for these wounding and thrilling themes and suspend our strategies for making worship palatable and safe.



Martin L. Smith, an Episcopal priest, is an author, preacher, and retreat leader. His newest book is Go in Peace: The Art of Hearing Confessions, with Julia Gatta.

[FEBRUARY 3]

Making a Prophet

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

SCRIPTURE RINGS WITH Moses' great prayer, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29). This week's scriptures are vital resources for those who dare to offer themselves, just as they are, for the prophetic task. The gospel passage from Luke recounts the furious reaction of Jesus' own neighbors in Nazareth to his claim, after reading one of the great prophetic chapters of Isaiah, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). The essence of prophecy is not that it predicts the future, but that it asserts the action of God in the present moment; here and now, in all the banality and confusion of current affairs. To say "Today!" guarantees a reaction of disgust and resentment from those who see God as above the fray. The prophet's credentials lie not in any official authorization, but in her experience of God in the fray, working and speaking through those whose eyes are riveted on the present as the field of divine judgment and re-creation.

Paul's famous passage about love in 1

Corinthians 13 is also about prophecy as a way of life. Authentic prophecy is inherently humble and self-critical, deeply aware of the inevitable limitations of our insight into the action and grace of God. Those who dare to witness prophetically don't have, and can't have, all the answers because "we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part ... For now we see in a mirror, dimly ..." (13:9, 12).

The opening verses of the book of Jeremiah are an invitation for those of us who seek to be prophetic witnesses to the kingdom to see the roots of our calling in the intimate action and presence of God in our own life histories. If you can't recognize God's actions in the microcosm of your own life, you can't prophesy authentically about God's actions in the world. Jeremiah's authority for confronting the political powers of his day has its roots in the inner presence of God in his life, dating right back to his conception and somehow even beyond that into God's own inner creative imagination: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5).

[FEBRUARY 10]

The Outward Gaze

Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99;
2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:2; Luke 9:28-43

"GAZING IS SUCH a wonderful thing, about which we know little; in gazing we are turned completely outward, but just when we are so most, things seem to go on within us, which have been waiting longingly for the moment in which they should be observed"—fascinating words from a letter the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to his wife, Clara, in March 1907. Maybe it was the coincidence that I first read them on the feast of the Transfiguration that inspired me to memorize them. They are a marvelous key to the scriptures for this week, as the season of Epiphany ends as always in a blaze of light by recounting the story of the Transfiguration. It is a story that epitomizes one of the critical themes of Christian spirituality: We cannot change ourselves by tinkering with our own minds or forcing our own feelings. Real change takes place subliminally through grace as we focus our attention not on our selves as objects of fascination, but on the face of the mystery we call God. Jesus climbs the mountain not "to work on himself," as we Americans say, but to seek the face of God. When Jesus looks there by faith, he himself shines with divine light.

The passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians takes up this theme as he plays with the story of Moses returning from his encounter with God on the mountain mysteriously incandescent. In worship and prayer and scriptural exploration, Christians are taken out of self-preoccupation into a kind of gazing at God, specifically at God manifest in the person of Jesus, the man of the cross. Even though there is a lot that is blurry, like a reflection in a cloudy mirror, we come to see who God actually is in the person of the humble Human One. And thus we open ourselves to being changed by God, precisely when we aren't trying to fix ourselves. "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

[FEBRUARY 17]

Who Are We?

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;
Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

LENT BEGINS, A journey for considering the most fundamental questions of identity: Who am I? Who are we? No one can answer the first without asking the second, since in scripture our identity is the hub of many spokes of relationship. The reading from Deuteronomy describes a ritual of sacrificial offering in which the worshippers claimed their place in the lineage of a sacred story: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous" (26:5). After reciting an outline of the story of the Exodus and the entry into the Promised Land, the text pointedly insists on the inclusion of "the aliens who reside among you" in the feast that follows the sacrifice. Claiming spiritual descent from Jacob is not authentic unless it leads to the embrace here and now of strangers, the others, because we are all in this together as descendants of migrants.

In the reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, we are given the earliest form of Christian creed through which people claimed their identity as Christians: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). Who we are is hidden in the paradox of a crucified Lord. Our identity is a new and profoundly mysterious one, conferred at the ground zero of the empty tomb, that strange sign left by a God who won't allow death to tear us from God's arms.

The question of identity is written also between the lines of the gospel account of Jesus' ordeal in the wilderness. Jesus' sense of who he was had to be hammered out on the anvil of conflict and stress. We won't be able to answer the question about who we really are in Jesus until we have the honesty to identify the ways in which our trust in God and the meaningfulness of life is being stretched and stressed now. That is our Lenten work.

[FEBRUARY 24]

A Rejected Creator?

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27;
Philippians 3:17 - 4:1; Luke 13:31-35

WHAT AGONIZING PATHOS there is in Jesus' cry of protest and grief over his contemporaries' rejection of the message of the kingdom; their refusal of a last chance to avert the catastrophe of national destruction! His deep sense of identification with God's Wisdom breaks out as he cries in her name, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34).

Jesus feels his own story recapitulating centuries of history in which a tender God has repeatedly reached out to shelter human beings from the conflagrations ignited by our own stupidity, cruelty, and self-destructiveness, as a mother hen might desperately run to shield her chicks from the flames in a barnyard fire, at the risk of her own life. But they scatter, fleeing from sheltering sacrificial love—and the fire engulfs them. Are our Sunday liturgies, with their upbeat, heart-warming tones, strong enough to contain the passion in Jesus' tragic vision of human self-destructiveness and the desperate tenderness of a compassionate, rejected Creator? Sometimes the scriptures sear us with a sense that we have so domesticated and trivialized our acts of worship that they can't act as a crucible for handling the red-heat of God's suffering love.

Psalm 27, one of the most impassioned and soaring sacred songs in the Bible, gives us some idea of what authentic worship needs to be. It speaks of seeking God's face, a term that refers to the awe-inspiring experience of worship in the temple. In this sublime song about "the beauty of the Lord" (verse 4), it is understood that worship must provide a crucible strong enough to contain searing honesty about the deadly effects in our lives of strife, lies, abandonment, and betrayal. ■

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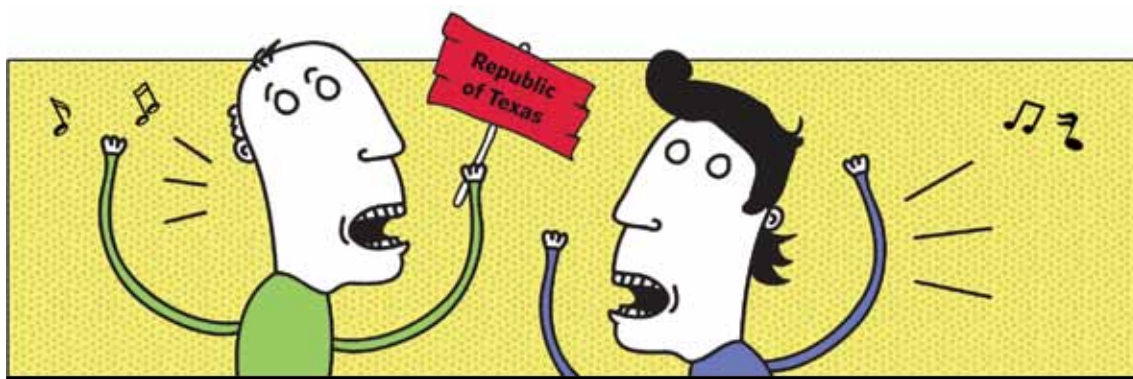
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Whistling 'Dixie' Off the Fiscal Cliff

SO HOW WAS your fall off the fiscal cliff? Did you drop straight to the bottom or bounce several times off jagged rocks on the way down, land in a bramble bush, and then stare back up at that annoying roadrunner? Ouch. (And why didn't the roadrunner jump off the cliff? Did he have a more reasonable approach to spending and taxation? Is he naturally more conciliatory with his opponents? Nah. He's just smarter about sudden dropoffs.)

I'm just asking because, as I write this, we're still heading toward that cliff, so I won't know if we drove off it, braked just short of it, or maybe

something you throw things off, like a stick you found, or a rock, or a Fox News pundit who is *now* talking positively about immigration reform. (Don't forget to make a wish before you make the toss.)

I've always preferred the railroad trestle analogy. You don't throw things off a trestle—a train bridge across a river sometimes hundreds of feet below—because you're too focused on not stepping between the ties and breaking a leg and then lying there helplessly until a train runs over you. As a youth I was dared to walk halfway across a trestle over the Wabash River and then back again before a train came. It

never did, and my foot didn't get caught, but I walked off of that trestle pale, sweaty

with fear, and determined to resolve any future legislative disagreements quickly and on a nonpartisan basis. The takeaway for our nation is simple: Instead of hanging around trestles with taunting teenagers, just stay home and watch afternoon cartoons.

THE U.S. NEEDS to get its economic house in order while there's still a house, since at last count more than 20 states had petitioned to secede. Make that 30 states. In fact the petitions are coming in so fast that Wolf Blitzer is having difficulty projecting the final tally, something he loves to do but which, ironically, nobody ever once asked for.

For a state to officially secede, it

must first gather at least 25,000 signatures, an easy task outside any Walmart in the early morning hours of Black Friday. (In exchange for something warm to drink, those people will sign anything.) Signatories must then learn all the verses of "Dixie" and correctly identify which side won in *Gone with the Wind*.

Although it's disconcerting that thousands of people want to sever ties with their fellow citizens, the good news is that their departure would actually help the budget, since most of these states receive millions of dollars more in federal aid than they contribute in federal taxes. It's going to take everyone pitching in to solve our fiscal problems, so if a balanced approach requires pushing Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas into the sea, I'm all for it. (Landlocked states may require professional movers.)

Many of these states might reconsider if President Obama is simply removed from office in a timely manner. This is definitely the plan of the Conservative Majority Fund, which has launched a campaign of robocalls for his impeachment and is accusing him of "high crimes and misdemeanors." (Question: If a man commits high crimes while in the Oval Office, shouldn't we give him a pass on the misdemeanors? I mean, let the guy keep the Evian he's been sneaking out of the limo, for gosh-sakes.) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Let the healing begin (maybe next week).

stopped to ask directions from an old guy sitting by the side of the road in a tattered beach chair. "Yup, you keep going straight for a couple miles, then look for the coyote tracks."

There is no question that our nation is facing major fiscal imbalances—although, to be fair, our low wages are more than offset by high cholesterol. But hopefully the president—Barack "Whew!ssein" Obama—will have avoided the impending crisis by reaching a compromise with Republican leaders, although at press time it seemed he was drawing a clear line in the sand. Of course, that's easy to change because, you know, it's just sand.

But I've never cared for the cliff analogy. I think of a cliff as

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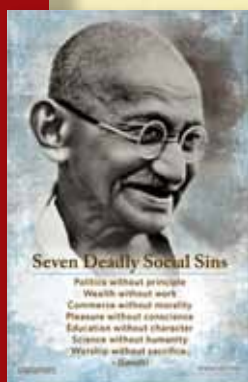
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